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Steptoe scrambled to his knees, revolver in hand

NOVELS AND STORIES
OF
BRET HARTE

THREE PARTNERS, OR THE BIG STRIKE ON
HEAVY TREE HILL
UNDER THE REDWOODS



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THREE PARTNERS; OR, THE
BIG STRIKE ON HEAVY
TREE HILL

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THREE PARTNERS.

PROLOGUE.

THE sun was going down on the Black Spur Range. The red light it had kindled there was still eating its way along the serrated crest, showing through gaps in the ranks of pines, etching out the interstices of broken boughs, fading away and then flashing suddenly out again like sparks in burnt-up paper. Then the night wind swept down the whole mountain side, and began its usual struggle with the shadows upclimbing from the valley, only to lose itself in the end and be absorbed in the all-conquering darkness. Yet for some time the pines on the long slope of Heavy Tree Hill murmured and protested with swaying arms; but as the shadows stole upwards, and cabin after cabin and tunnel after tunnel were swallowed up, a complete silence followed.

Only the sky remained visible — a vast concave mirror of dull steel, in which the stars did not seem to be set, but only reflected.

A single cabin door on the crest of Heavy Tree Hill had remained open to the wind and darkness. Then it was slowly shut by an invisible figure, afterwards revealed by the embers of the fire it was stirring. At first only this figure brooding over the hearth was shown, but as the flames leaped up, two other figures could be seen sitting motionless before it. When the door was shut, they acknowledged that interruption by slightly changing their position ; the one who had risen to shut the door sank back into an invisible seat, but the attitude of each man was one of profound reflection or reserve, and apparently upon some common subject which made them respect each other's silence. However, this was at last broken by a laugh. It was a boyish laugh, and came from the youngest of the party. The two others turned their profiles and glanced inquiringly towards him, but did not speak.

“ I was thinking,” he began in apologetic explanation, “ how mighty queer it was that while we were working like niggers on grub

wages, without the ghost of a chance of making a strike, how we used to sit here, night after night, and flapdoodle and speculate about what we'd do if we ever *did* make one; and now, Great Scott! that we *have* made it, and are just wallowing in gold, here we are sitting as glum and silent as if we'd had a washout! Why, Lord! I remember one night — not so long ago, either — that you two quarreled over the swell hotel you were going to stop at in 'Frisco, and whether you would n't strike straight out for London and Rome and Paris, or go away to Japan and China and round by India and the Red Sea."

"No, we did n't *quarrel* over it," said one of the figures gently; "there was only a little discussion."

"Yes, but you did, though," returned the young fellow mischievously, "and you told Stacy, there, that we'd better learn something of the world before we tried to buy it or even hire it, and that it was just as well to get the hayseed out of our hair and the slumgullion off our boots before we mixed in polite society."

"Well, I don't see what's the matter

with that sentiment now," returned the second speaker good-humoredly; "only," he added gravely, "we did n't quarrel — God forbid!"

There was something in the speaker's tone which seemed to touch a common chord in their natures, and this was voiced by Barker with sudden and almost pathetic earnestness. "I tell you what, boys, we ought to swear here to-night to always stand by each other — in luck and out of it! We ought to hold ourselves always at each other's call. We ought to have a kind of password or signal, you know, by which we could summon each other at any time from any quarter of the globe!"

"Come off the roof, Barker," murmured Stacy, without lifting his eyes from the fire. But Demorest smiled and glanced tolerantly at the younger man.

"Yes, but look here, Stacy," continued Barker, "comrades like us, in the old days, used to do that in times of trouble and adventures. Why should n't we do it in our luck?"

"There's a good deal in that, Barker boy," said Demorest, "though, as a general

thing, passwords butter no parsnips, and the ordinary, every-day, single yelp from a wolf brings the whole pack together for business about as quick as a password. But you cling to that sentiment, and put it away with your gold-dust in your belt."

"What I like about Barker is his com-
modiousness," said Stacy. "Here he is, the
only man among us that has his future
fixed and his preëmption lines laid out and
registered. He's already got a girl that
he's going to marry and settle down with
on the strength of his luck. And I'd like
to know what Kitty Carter, when she's Mrs.
Barker, would say to her husband being
signaled for from Asia or Africa. I don't
seem to see her tumbling to any password.
And when he and she go into a new part-
nership, I reckon she'll let the old one
slide."

"That's just where you're wrong!" said
Barker, with quickly rising color. "She's
the sweetest girl in the world, and she'd be
sure to understand our feelings. Why, she
thinks everything of you two; she was just
eager for you to get this claim, which has
put us where we are, when I held back, and

if it had n't been for her, by Jove! we would n't have had it."

"That was only because she cared for *you*," returned Stacy, with a half-yawn; "and now that you've got *your* share she is n't going to take a breathless interest in *us*. And, by the way, I'd rather *you*'d remind us that we owe our luck to her than that *she* should ever remind *you* of it."

"What do you mean?" said Barker quickly. But Demorest here rose lazily, and, throwing a gigantic shadow on the wall, stood between the two with his back to the fire. "He means," he said slowly, "that you're talking rot, and so is he. However, as yours comes from the heart and his from the head, I prefer yours. But you're both making me tired. Let's have a fresh deal."

Nobody ever dreamed of contradicting Demorest. Nevertheless, Barker persisted eagerly: "But is n't it better for us to look at this cheerfully and happily all round? There's nothing criminal in our having made a strike! It seems to me, boys that of all ways of making money it's the squarest and most level; nobody is the

poorer for it ; our luck brings no misfortune to others. The gold was put there ages ago for anybody to find ; we found it. It has n't been tarnished by man's touch before. I don't know how it strikes you, boys, but it seems to me that of all gifts that are going it is the straightest. For whether we deserve it or not, it comes to us first-hand — from God ! ”

The two men glanced quickly at the speaker, whose face flushed and then smiled embarrassedly as if ashamed of the enthusiasm into which he had been betrayed. But Demorest did not smile, and Stacy's eyes shone in the firelight as he said languidly, “ I never heard that prospecting was a religious occupation before. But I should n't wonder if you're right, Barker boy. So let's liquor up.”

Nevertheless he did not move, nor did the others. The fire leaped higher, bringing out the rude rafters and sternly economic details of the rough cabin, and making the occupants in their seats before the fire look gigantic by contrast.

“ Who shut the door ? ” said Demorest after a pause.

"I did," said Barker. "I reckoned it was getting cold."

"Better open it again, now that the fire 's blazing. It will light the way if any of the men from below want to drop in this evening."

Stacy stared at his companion. "I thought that it was understood that we were giving them that dinner at Boomville tomorrow night, so that we might have the last evening here by ourselves in peace and quietness?"

"Yes, but if any one *did* want to come it would seem churlish to shut him out," said Demorest.

"I reckon you 're feeling very much as I am," said Stacy, "that this good fortune is rather crowding to us three alone. For myself, I know," he continued, with a backward glance towards a blanketed, covered pile in the corner of the cabin, "that I feel rather oppressed by — by — its specific gravity, I calculate — and sort of crampy and twitchy in the legs, as if I ought to 'lite' out and do something, and yet it holds me here. All the same, I doubt if anybody will come up — except from curiosity. Our

luck has made them rather sore down the hill, for all they're coming to the dinner to-morrow."

"That's only human nature," said Demorest.

"But," said Barker eagerly, "what does it mean? Why, only this afternoon, when I was passing the 'Old Kentuck' tunnel, where those Marshalls have been grubbing along for four years without making a single strike, I felt ashamed to look at them, and as they barely nodded to me I slinked by as if I had done them an injury. I don't understand it."

"It somehow does not seem to square with this 'gift of God' idea of yours, does it?" said Stacy. "But we'll open the door and give them a show."

As he did so it seemed as if the night were their only guest, and had been waiting on the threshold to now enter bodily and pervade all things with its presence. With that cool, fragrant inflow of air they breathed freely. The red edge had gone from Black Spur, but it was even more clearly defined against the sky in its towering blackness. The sky itself had grown lighter, although

the stars still seemed mere reflections of the solitary pin-points of light scattered along the concave valley below. Mingling with the cooler, restful air of the summit, yet penetratingly distinct from it, arose the stimulating breath of the pines below, still hot and panting from the day-long sun. The silence was intense. The far-off barking of a dog on the invisible river-bar nearly a mile beneath them came to them like a sound in a dream. They had risen, and, standing in the doorway, by common consent turned their faces to the east. It was the frequent attitude of the home-remembering miner, and it gave him the crowning glory of the view. For, beyond the pine-hearsed summits, rarely seen except against the evening sky, lay a thin, white cloud like a dropped portion of the Milky Way. Faint with an indescribable pallor, remote yet distinct enough to assert itself above and beyond all surrounding objects, it was always there. It was the snow-line of the Sierras.

They turned away and silently reseated themselves, the same thought in the minds of each. Here was something they could not take away, something to be left for-

ever and irretrievably behind, — left with the healthy life they had been leading, the cheerful endeavor, the undying hopefulness which it had fostered and blessed. Was what they *were* taking away worth it? And oddly enough, frank and outspoken as they had always been to each other, that common thought remained unuttered. Even Barker was silent; perhaps he was also thinking of Kitty.

Suddenly two figures appeared in the very doorway of the cabin. The effect was startling upon the partners, who had only just reseated themselves, and for a moment they had forgotten that the narrow band of light which shot forth from the open door rendered the darkness on either side of it more impenetrable, and that out of this darkness, although themselves guided by the light, the figures had just emerged. Yet one was familiar enough. It was the Hill drunkard, Dick Hall, or, as he was called, “Whiskey Dick,” or, indicated still more succinctly by the Hill humorists, “Alky Hall.”

Everybody had seen that sodden, puffy, but good-humored face; everybody had felt the fiery exhalations of that enormous red

beard, which always seemed to be kept in a state of moist, unkempt luxuriance by liquor; everybody knew the absurd dignity of manner and attempted precision of statement with which he was wont to disguise his frequent excesses. Very few, however, knew, or cared to know, the pathetic weariness and chilling horror that sometimes looked out of those bloodshot eyes.

He was evidently equally unprepared for the three silent seated figures before the door, and for a moment looked at them blankly with the doubts of a frequently deceived perception. Was he sure that they were quite real? He had not dared to look at his companion for verification, but smiled vaguely.

“Good-evening,” said Demorest pleasantly.

Whiskey Dick’s face brightened. “Good-evenin’, good-evenin’ yourselves, boys — and see how you like it! Lemme interdrush my ole frien’ William J. Steptoe, of Red Gulch. Stepsho — Steptoe — is shtay—ish stay—” He stopped, hiccupped, waved his hand gravely, and with an air of reproachful dignity concluded, “sojourning for

the present on the Bar. We wish to offer our congrashulashen and felish— felish—” He paused again, and, leaning against the door-post, added severely, “—itations.”

His companion, however, laughed coarsely, and, pushing past Dick, entered the cabin. He was a short, powerful man, with a closely cropped crust of beard and hair that seemed to adhere to his round head like moss or lichen. He cast a glance—furtive rather than curious—around the cabin, and said, with a familiarity that had not even good humor to excuse it, “So you ’re the gay galoots who ’ve made the big strike? Thought I ’d meander up the Hill with this old bloat Alky, and drop in to see the show. And here you are, feeling your oats, eh? and not caring any particular G—d d—n if school keeps or not.”

“Show Mr. Steptoe—the whiskey,” said Demorest to Stacy. Then quietly addressing Dick, but ignoring Steptoe as completely as Steptoe had ignored his unfortunate companion, he said, “You quite startled us at first. We did not see you come up the trail.”

“No. We came up the back trail to

please Steptoe, who wanted to see round the cabin," said Dick, glancing nervously yet with a forced indifference towards the whiskey which Stacy was offering to the stranger.

"What yer gettin' off there?" said Steptoe, facing Dick almost brutally. "You know your tangled legs wouldn't take you straight up the trail, and you had to make a circumbendibus. Gosh! if you had n't scented this lickier at the top you'd have never found it."

"No matter! I'm glad you *did* find it, Dick," said Demorest, "and I hope you'll find the liquor good enough to pay you for the trouble."

Barker stared at Demorest. This extraordinary tolerance of the drunkard was something new in his partner. But at a glance from Demorest he led Dick to the demijohn and tin cup which stood on a table in the corner. And in another moment Dick had forgotten his companion's rudeness.

Demorest remained by the door, looking out into the darkness.

"Well," said Steptoe, putting down his emptied cup, "trot out your strike. I reckon our eyes are strong enough to bear

it now." Stacy drew the blanket from the vague pile that stood in the corner, and discovered a deep tin prospecting-pan. It was heaped with several large fragments of quartz. At first the marble whiteness of the quartz and the glittering crystals of mica in its veins were the most noticeable, but as they drew closer they could see the dull yellow of gold filling the decomposed and honeycombed portion of the rock as if still liquid and molten. The eyes of the party sparkled like the mica—even those of Barker and Stacy, who were already familiar with the treasure.

"Which is the richest chunk?" asked Steptoe in a thickening voice.

Stacy pointed it out.

"Why, it's smaller than the others."

"Heft it in your hand," said Barker, with boyish enthusiasm.

The short, thick fingers of Steptoe grasped it with a certain aquiline suggestion; his whole arm strained over it until his face grew purple, but he could not lift it.

"Thar useter be a little game in the 'Frisco Mint," said Dick, restored to fluency by his liquor, "when thar war ladies visit

ing it, and that was to offer to give 'em any of those little boxes of gold coin, that contained five thousand dollars, ef they would kindly lift it from the counter and take it away! It was n't no bigger than one of these chunks; but Jiminy! you oughter have seed them gals grip and heave on it, and then hev to give it up! You see they did n't know anything about the paci—(hic) the speshif—” He stopped with great dignity, and added with painful precision, “the specific gravity of gold.”

“Dry up!” said Steptoe roughly. Then turning to Stacy he said abruptly, “But where's the rest of it? You've got more than that.”

“We sent it to Boomville this morning. You see we've sold out our claim to a company who take it up to-morrow, and put up a mill and stamps. In fact, it's under their charge now. They've got a gang of men on the claim already.”

“And what mout ye hev got for it, if it's a fair question?” said Steptoe, with a forced smile.

Stacy smiled also. “I don't know that it's a business question,” he said.

“Five hundred thousand dollars,” said Demorest abruptly from the doorway, “and a treble interest.”

The eyes of the two men met. There was no mistaking the dull fire of envy in Steptoe’s glance, but Demorest received it with a certain cold curiosity, and turned away as the sound of arriving voices came from without.

“Five hundred thousand’s a big figger,” said Steptoe, with a coarse laugh, “and I don’t wonder it makes you feel so d—d sassy. But it *was* a fair question.”

Unfortunately it here occurred to the whiskey-stimulated brain of Dick that the friend he had introduced was being treated with scant courtesy, and he forgot his own treatment by Steptoe. Leaning against the wall he waved a dignified rebuke. “I’m sashified my ole frien’ is akshuated by only businesh principles.” He paused, recollected himself, and added with great precision: “When I say he himself has a valuable claim in Red Gulch, and to my shertain knowledge has received offers — I have said enough.”

The laugh that broke from Stacy and

Barker, to whom the infelicitous reputation of Red Gulch was notorious, did not allay Steptoe's irritation. He darted a vindictive glance at the unfortunate Dick, but joined in the laugh. "And what was ye goin' to do with that?" he said, pointing to the treasure.

"Oh, we're taking that with us. There's a chunk for each of us as a memento. We cast lots for the choice, and Demorest won, — that one which you could n't lift with one hand, you know," said Stacy.

"Oh, could n't I? I reckon you ain't goin' to give me the same chance that they did at the Mint, eh?"

Although the remark was accompanied with his usual coarse, familiar laugh, there was a look in his eye so inconsequent in its significance that Stacy would have made some reply, but at this moment Demorest re-entered the cabin, ushering in a half dozen miners from the Bar below. They were, although youngish men, some of the older locators in the vicinity, yet, through years of seclusion and uneventful labors, they had acquired a certain childish simplicity of thought and manner that was alternately

amusing and pathetic. They had never intruded upon the reserve of the three partners of Heavy Tree Hill before; nothing but an infantine curiosity, a shy recognition of the partners' courtesy in inviting them with the whole population of Heavy Tree to the dinner the next day, and the never-to-be-resisted temptation of an evening of "free liquor" and forgetfulness of the past had brought them there now. Among them, and yet not of them, was a young man who, although speaking English without accent, was distinctly of a different nationality and race. This, with a certain neatness of dress and artificial suavity of address, had gained him the nickname of "the Count" and "Frenchy," although he was really of Flemish extraction. He was the Union Ditch Company's agent on the Bar, by virtue of his knowledge of languages.

Barker uttered an exclamation of pleasure when he saw him. Himself the incarnation of naturalness, he had always secretly admired this young foreigner, with his lacquered smoothness, although a vague consciousness that neither Stacy nor Demorest shared his feelings had restricted their

acquaintance. Nevertheless, he was proud now to see the bow with which Paul Van Loo entered the cabin as if it were a drawing-room, and perhaps did not reflect upon that want of real feeling in an act which made the others uncomfortable.

The slight awkwardness their entrance produced, however, was quickly forgotten when the blanket was again lifted from the pan of treasure. Singularly enough, too, the same feverish light came into the eyes of each as they all gathered around this yellow shrine. Even the polite Paul rudely elbowed his way between the others, though his artificial "Pardon" seemed to Barker to condone this act of brutal instinct. But it was more instructive to observe the manner in which the older locators received this confirmation of the fickle Fortune that had overlooked their weary labors and years of waiting to lavish her favors on the new and inexperienced amateurs. Yet as they turned their dazzled eyes upon the three partners there was no envy or malice in their depths, no reproach on their lips, no insincerity in their wondering satisfaction. Rather there was a touching, almost childlike resumption

of hope as they gazed at this conclusive evidence of Nature's bounty. The gold had been there — *they* had only missed it! And if there, more could be found! Was it not a proof of the richness of Heavy Tree Hill? So strongly was this reflected on their faces that a casual observer, contrasting them with the thoughtful countenances of the real owners, would have thought them the lucky ones. It touched Barker's quick sympathies, it puzzled Stacy, it made Demorest more serious, it aroused Steptoe's active contempt. Whiskey Dick alone remained stolid and impassive in a desperate attempt to pull himself once more together. Eventually he succeeded, even to the ambitious achievement of mounting a chair and lifting his tin cup with a dangerously unsteady hand, which did not, however, affect his precision of utterance, and said: —

“Order, gentlemen! We'll drink success to — to” —

“The next strike!” said Barker, leaping impetuously on another chair and beaming upon the old locators — “and may it come to those who have so long deserved it!”

His sincere and generous enthusiasm

seemed to break the spell of silence that had fallen upon them. Other toasts quickly followed. In the general good feeling Barker attached himself to Van Loo with his usual boyish effusion, and in a burst of confidence imparted the secret of his engagement to Kitty Carter. Van Loo listened with polite attention, formal congratulations, but inscrutable eyes, that occasionally wandered to Stacy and again to the treasure. A slight chill of disappointment came over Barker's quick sensitiveness. Perhaps his enthusiasm had bored this superior man of the world. Perhaps his confidences were in bad taste! With a new sense of his inexperience he turned sadly away. Van Loo took that opportunity to approach Stacy.

"What's all this I hear of Barker being engaged to Miss Carter?" he said, with a faintly superior smile. "Is it really true?"

"Yes. Why should n't it be?" returned Stacy bluntly.

Van Loo was instantly deprecating and smiling. "Why not, of course? But is n't it sudden?"

"They have known each other ever since

he's been on Heavy Tree Hill," responded Stacy.

"Ah, yes! True," said Van Loo. "But now" —

"Well — he's got money enough to marry, and he's going to marry."

"Rather young, is n't he?" said Van Loo, still deprecatingly. "And she's got nothing. Used to wait on the table at her father's hotel in Boomville, did n't she?"

"Yes. What of that? We all know it."

"Of course. It's an excellent thing for her — and her father. He'll have a rich son-in-law. About two hundred thousand is his share, is n't it? I suppose old Carter is delighted?"

Stacy had thought this before, but did not care to have it corroborated by this superfine young foreigner. "And I don't reckon that Barker is offended if he is," he said curtly as he turned away. Nevertheless, he felt irritated that one of the three superior partners of Heavy Tree Hill should be thought a dupe.

Suddenly the conversation dropped, the laughter ceased. Every one turned round,

and, by a common instinct, looked towards the door. From the obscurity of the hill slope below came a wonderful tenor voice, modulated by distance and spiritualized by the darkness: —

“When at some future day
I shall be far away,
Thou wilt be weeping,
Thy lone watch keeping.”

The men looked at one another. “That’s Jack Hamlin,” they said. “What’s he doing here?”

“The wolves are gathering around fresh meat,” said Steptoe, with his coarse laugh and a glance at the treasure. “Did n’t ye know he came over from Red Dog yesterday?”

“Well, give Jack a fair show and his own game,” said one of the old locators, “and he’d clean out that pile afore sunrise.”

“And lose it next day,” added another.

“But never turn a hair or change a muscle in either case,” said a third. “Lord! I’ve heard him sing away just like that when he’s been leaving the board with five thousand dollars in his pocket, or going away stripped of his last red cent.”

Van Loo, who had been listening with a peculiar smile, here said in his most deprecating manner, "Yes, but did you never consider the influence that such a man has on the hard-working tunnelmen, who are ready to gamble their whole week's earnings to him? Perhaps not. But I know the difficulties of getting the Ditch rates from these men when he has been in camp."

He glanced around him with some importance, but only a laugh followed his speech. "Come, Frenchy," said an old locator, "you only say that because your little brother wanted to play with Jack like a grown man, and when Jack ordered him off the board and he became sassy, Jack scooted him out the saloon."

Van Loo's face reddened with an anger that had the apparent effect of removing every trace of his former polished repose, and leaving only a hard outline beneath. At which Demorest interfered: —

"I can't say that I see much difference in gambling by putting money into a hole in the ground and expecting to take more from it than by putting it on a card for the same purpose."

Here the ravishing tenor voice, which had been approaching, ceased, and was succeeded by a heart-breaking and equally melodious whistling to finish the bar of the singer's song. And the next moment Jack Hamlin appeared in the doorway.

Whatever was his present financial condition, in perfect self-possession and charming *sang-froid* he fully bore out his previous description. He was as clean and refreshing looking as a madroño-tree in the dust-blown forest. An odor of scented soap and freshly ironed linen was wafted from him; there was scarcely a crease in his white waistcoat, nor a speck upon his varnished shoes. He might have been an auditor of the previous conversation, so quickly and completely did he seem to take in the whole situation at a glance. Perhaps there was an extra tilt to his black-ribboned Panama hat, and a certain dancing devilry in his brown eyes — which might also have been an answer to adverse criticism.

“When I, his truth to prove, would trifle with my love,” he warbled in general continuance from the doorway. Then dropping cheerfully into speech, he added, “Well,

boys, I am here to welcome the little stranger, and to trust that the family are doing as well as can be expected. Ah! there it is! Bless it!" he went on, walking leisurely to the treasure. "Triplets, too!—and plump at that. Have you had 'em weighed?"

Frankness was an essential quality of Heavy Tree Hill. "We were just saying, Jack," said an old locator, "that, giving you a fair show and your own game, you could manage to get away with that pile before daybreak."

"And I'm just thinking," said Jack cheerfully, "that there were some of you here that could do that without any such useless preliminary." His brown eyes rested for a moment on Steptoe, but turning quite abruptly to Van Loo, he held out his hand. Startled and embarrassed before the others, the young man at last advanced his, when Jack coolly put his own, as if forgetfully, in his pocket. "I thought you might like to know what that little brother of yours is doing," he said to Van Loo, yet looking at Steptoe. "I found him wandering about the Hill here quite drunk."

“I have repeatedly warned him” — began Van Loo, reddening.

“Against bad company — I know,” suggested Jack gayly; “yet in spite of all that, I think he owes some of his liquor to Steptoe yonder.”

“I never supposed the fool would get drunk over a glass of whiskey offered in fun,” said Steptoe harshly, yet evidently quite as much disconcerted as angry.

“The trouble with Steptoe,” said Hamlin, thoughtfully spanning his slim waist with both hands as he looked down at his polished shoes, “is that he has such a soft-hearted liking for all weaknesses. Always wanting to protect chaps that can’t look after themselves, whether it’s Whiskey Dick there when he has a pull on, or some nigger when he’s made a little strike, or that straying lamb of Van Loo’s when he’s puppy drunk. But you’re wrong about me, boys. You can’t draw me in any game to-night. This is one of my nights off, which I devote exclusively to contemplation and song. But,” he added, suddenly turning to his three hosts with a bewildering and fascinating change of expression, “I could n’t resist coming

up here to see you and your pile, even if I never saw the one or the other before, and am not likely to see either again. I believe in luck! And it comes a mighty sight oftener than a fellow thinks it does. But it does n't come to stay. So I'd advise you to keep your eyes skinned, and hang on to it while it's with you, like grim death. So long!"

Resisting all attempts of his hosts — who had apparently fallen as suddenly and unaccountably under the magic of his manner — to detain him longer, he stepped lightly away, his voice presently rising again in melody as he descended the hill. Nor was it at all remarkable that the others, apparently drawn by the same inevitable magnetism, were impelled to follow him, naturally joining their voices with his, leaving Steptoe and Van Loo so markedly behind them alone that they were compelled at last in sheer embarrassment to close up the rear of the procession. In another moment the cabin and the three partners again relapsed into the peace and quiet of the night. With the dying away of the last voices on the hillside the old solitude reasserted itself.

But since the irruption of the strangers they had lost their former sluggish contemplation, and now busied themselves in preparation for their early departure from the cabin the next morning. They had arranged to spend the following day and night at Boomville and Carter's Hotel, where they were to give their farewell dinner to Heavy Tree Hill. They talked but little together: since the rebuff his enthusiastic confidences had received from Van Loo, Barker had been grave and thoughtful, and Stacy, with the irritating recollection of Van Loo's criticisms in his mind, had refrained from his usual rallying of Barker. Oddly enough, they spoke chiefly of Jack Hamlin,—till then personally a stranger to them, on account of his infelix reputation,—and even the critical Demorest expressed a wish they had known him before. "But you never know the real value of anything until you're quitting it or it's quitting you," he added sententiously.

Barker and Stacy both stared at their companion. It was unlike Demorest to regret anything—particularly a mere social diversion.

“They say,” remarked Stacy, “that if you had known Jack Hamlin earlier and professionally, a great deal of real value would have quitted you before he did.”

“Don’t repeat that rot flung out by men who have played Jack’s game and lost,” returned Demorest derisively. “I’d rather trust him than” — He stopped, glanced at the meditative Barker, and then concluded abruptly, “the whole caboodle of his critics.”

They were silent for a few moments, and then seemed to have fallen into their former dreamy mood as they relapsed into their old seats again. At last Stacy drew a long breath. “I wish we had sent those nuggets off with the others this morning.”

“Why?” said Demorest suddenly.

“Why? Well, d—n it all! they kind of oppress me, don’t you see. I seem to feel ’em here, on my chest — all the three,” returned Stacy only half jocularly. “It’s their d—d specific gravity, I suppose. I don’t like the idea of sleeping in the same room with ’em. They’re altogether too much for us three men to be left alone with.”

“You don’t mean that you think that anybody would attempt” — said Demorest.

Stacy curled a fighting lip rather superciliously. "No; I don't think *that* — I rather wish I did. It's the blessed chunks of solid gold that seem to have got *us* fast, don't you know, and are going to stick to us for good or ill. A sort of Frankenstein monster that we've picked out of a hole from below."

"I know just what Stacy means," said Barker breathlessly, rounding his gray eyes. "I've felt it, too. Could n't we make a sort of cache of it — bury it just outside the cabin for to-night? It would be sort of putting it back into its old place, you know, for the time being. *It* might like it."

The other two laughed. "Rather rough on Providence, Barker boy," said Stacy, "handing back the Heaven-sent gift so soon! Besides, what's to keep any prospector from coming along and making a strike of it? You know that's mining law — if you have n't preëmpted the spot as a claim."

But Barker was too staggered by this material statement to make any reply, and Demorest arose. "And I feel that you'd both better be turning in, as we've got to get up early." He went to the corner of the

cabin, and threw the blanket back over the pan and its treasure. "There! that'll keep the chunks from getting up to ride astride of you like a nightmare." He shut the door and gave a momentary glance at its cheap hinges and the absence of bolt or bar. Stacy caught his eye. "We'll miss this security in San Francisco — perhaps even in Boomville," he sighed.

It was scarcely ten o'clock, but Stacy and Barker had begun to undress themselves with intervals of yawning and desultory talk, Barker continuing an amusing story, with one stocking off and his trousers hanging on his arm, until at last both men were snugly curled up in their respective bunks. Presently Stacy's voice came from under the blankets:—

"Hallo! are n't you going to turn in, too?"

"Not yet," said Demorest from his chair before the fire. "You see it's the last night in the old shanty, and I reckon I'll see the rest of it out."

"That's so," said the impulsive Barker, struggling violently with his blankets. "I tell you what, boys: we just ought to make

a watch-night of it — a regular vigil, you know — until twelve at least. Hold on! I'll get up, too!" But here Demorest arose, caught his youthful partner's bare foot which went searching painfully for the ground in one hand, tucked it back under the blankets, and heaping them on the top of him, patted the bulk with an authoritative, paternal air.

"You'll just say your prayers and go to sleep, sonny. You'll want to be fresh as a daisy to appear before Miss Kitty to-morrow early, and you can keep your vigils for to-morrow night, after dinner, in the back drawing-room. I said 'Good-night,' and I mean it!"

Protesting feebly, Barker finally yielded in a nestling shiver and a sudden silence. Demorest walked back to his chair. A prolonged snore came from Stacy's bunk; then everything was quiet. Demorest stirred up the fire, cast a huge root upon it, and, leaning back in his chair, sat with half-closed eyes and dreamed.

It was an old dream that for the past three years had come to him daily, sometimes even overtaking him under the shade

of a buckeye in his noontide rest on his claim, — a dream that had never yet failed to wait for him at night by the fireside when his partners were at rest ; a dream of the past, but so real that it always made the present seem the dream through which he was moving towards some sure awakening.

It was not strange that it should come to him to-night, as it had often come before, slowly shaping itself out of the obscurity as the vision of a fair young girl seated in one of the empty chairs before him. Always the same pretty, childlike face, fraught with a half-frightened, half-wondering trouble ; always the same slender, graceful figure, but always glimmering in diamonds and satin, or spiritual in lace and pearls, against his own rude and sordid surroundings ; always silent with parted lips, until the night wind smote some chord of recollection, and then mingled a remembered voice with his own. For at those times he seemed to speak also, albeit with closed lips, and an utterance inaudible to all but her.

“ Well ? ” he said sadly.

“ Well ? ” the voice repeated, like a gentle echo blending with his own.

“You know it all now,” he went on. “You know that it has come at last,—all that I had worked for, prayed for; all that would have made us happy here; all that would have saved you to me has come at last, and all too late!”

“Too late!” echoed the voice with his.

“You remember,” he went on, “the last day we were together. You remember your friends and family would have you give me up—a penniless man. You remember when they reproached you with my poverty, and told you that it was only your wealth that I was seeking, that I then determined to go away and never to return to claim you until that reproach could be removed. You remember, dearest, how you clung to me and bade me stay with you, even fly with you, but not to leave you alone with them. You wore the same dress that day, darling; your eyes had the same wondering childlike fear and trouble in them; your jewels glittered on you as you trembled, and I refused. In my pride, or rather in my weakness and cowardice, I refused. I came away and broke my heart among these rocks and ledges, yet grew strong; and you, my love,

you, sheltered and guarded by those you loved, *you*" — He stopped and buried his face in his hands. The night wind breathed down the chimney, and from the stirred ashes on the hearth came the soft whisper, "I died."

"And then," he went on, "I cared for nothing. Sometimes my heart awoke for this young partner of mine in his innocent, trustful love for a girl that even in her humble station was far beyond his hopes, and I pitied myself in him. Home, fortune, friends, I no longer cared for — all were forgotten. And now they are returning to me — only that I may see the hollowness and vanity of them, and taste the bitterness for which I have sacrificed you. And here, on this last night of my exile, I am confronted with only the jealousy, the doubt, the meanness and selfishness that is to come. Too late! Too late!"

The wondering, troubled eyes that had looked into his here appeared to clear and brighten with a sweet prescience. Was it the wind moaning in the chimney that seemed to whisper to him: "Too late, beloved, for *me*, but not for you. *I* died, but

Love still lives. Be happy, Philip. And in your happiness I too may live again”?

He started. In the flickering firelight the chair was empty. The wind that had swept down the chimney had stirred the ashes with a sound like the passage of a rustling skirt. There was a chill in the air and a smell like that of opened earth. A nervous shiver passed over him. Then he sat upright. There was no mistake; it was no superstitious fancy, but a faint, damp current of air was actually flowing across his feet towards the fireplace. He was about to rise when he stopped suddenly and became motionless.

He was actively conscious now of a strange sound which had affected him even in the preoccupation of his vision. It was a gentle brushing of some yielding substance like that made by a soft broom on sand, or the sweep of a gown. But to his mountain ears, attuned to every woodland sound, it was not like the gnawing of gopher or squirrel, the scratching of wildcat, nor the hairy rubbing of bear. Nor was it human; the long, deep respirations of his sleeping companions were distinct from that monotonous sound. He

could not even tell if it were *in* the cabin or without. Suddenly his eye fell upon the pile in the corner. The blanket that covered the treasure was actually moving!

He rose quickly, but silently, alert, self-contained, and menacing. For this dreamer, this bereaved man, this scornful philosopher of riches had disappeared with that midnight trespass upon the sacred treasure. The movement of the blanket ceased; the soft, swishing sound recommenced. He drew a glittering bowie-knife from his boot-leg, and in three noiseless strides was beside the pile. There he saw what he fully expected to see, — a narrow, horizontal gap between the log walls of the cabin and the adobe floor, slowly widening and deepening by the burrowing of unseen hands from without. The cold outer air which he had felt before was now plainly flowing into the heated cabin through the opening. The swishing sound recommenced, and stopped. Then the four fingers of a hand, palm downwards, were cautiously introduced between the bottom log and the denuded floor. Upon that intruding hand the bowie-knife of Demorest descended like a flash of lightning. There was no outcry.

Even in that supreme moment Demorest felt a pang of admiration for the stoicism of the unseen trespasser. But the maimed hand was quickly withdrawn, and as quickly Demorest rushed to the door and dashed into the outer darkness.

For an instant he was dazed and bewildered by the sudden change. But the next moment he saw a dodging, doubling figure running before him, and threw himself upon it. In the shock both men fell, but even in that contact Demorest felt the tangled beard and alcoholic fumes of Whiskey Dick, and felt also that the hands which were thrown up against his breast, the palms turned outward with the instinctive movement of a timid, defenseless man, were unstained with soil or blood. With an oath he threw the drunkard from him and dashed to the rear of the cabin. But too late! There, indeed, was the scattered earth, there the widened burrow as it had been excavated apparently by that mutilated hand — but nothing else!

He turned back to Whiskey Dick. But the miserable man, although still retaining a look of dazed terror in his eyes, had recovered his feet in a kind of angry confidence

and a forced sense of injury. What did Demorest mean by attacking "innoshent" gentlemen on the trail outside his cabin? Yes! *outside* his cabin, he would swear it!

"What were you doing here at midnight?" demanded Demorest.

What was he doing? What was any gentleman doing? He was n't any molly-coddle to go to bed at ten o'clock! What was he doing? Well—he'd been with men who did n't shut their doors and turn the boys out just in the shank of the evening. He was n't any Barker to be wet-nursed by Demorest.

"Some one else was here!" said Demorest sternly, with his eyes fixed on Whiskey Dick. The dull glaze which seemed to veil the outer world from the drunkard's pupils shifted suddenly with such a look of direct horror that Demorest was fain to turn away his own. But the veil mercifully returned, and with it Dick's worked-up sense of injury. Nobody was there—not "a shole." Did Demorest think if there had been any of his friends there they would have stood by like "dogsh" and seen him insulted?

Demorest turned away and reëntered the

cabin as Dick lurched heavily forward, still muttering, down the trail. The excitement over, a sickening repugnance to the whole incident took the place of Demorest's resentment and indignation. There had been a cowardly attempt to rob them of their miserable treasure. He had met it and frustrated it in almost as brutal a fashion: the gold was already tarnished with blood. To his surprise, yet relief, he found his partners unconscious of the outrage, still sleeping with the physical immobility of over-excited and tired men. Should he awaken them? No! He should have to awaken also their suspicions and desire for revenge. There was no danger of a further attack; there was no fear that the culprit would disclose himself, and to-morrow they would be far away. Let oblivion rest upon that night's stain on the honor of Heavy Tree Hill.

He rolled a small barrel before the opening, smoothed the dislodged earth, replaced the pan with its treasure, and trusted that in the bustle of the early morning departure his partners might not notice any change. Stopping before the bunk of Stacy he glanced at the sleeping man. He was lying on his

back, but breathing heavily, and his hands were moving towards his chest as if, indeed, his strange fancy of the golden incubus were being realized. Demorest would have wakened him, but presently, with a sigh of relief, the sleeper turned over on his side. It was pleasanter to look at Barker, whose damp curls were matted over his smooth, boyish forehead, and whose lips were parted in a smile under the silken wings of his brown mustache. He, too, seemed to be trying to speak, and remembering some previous revelations which had amused them, Demorest leaned over him fraternally with an answering smile, waiting for the beloved one's name to pass the young man's lips. But he only murmured, "Three — hundred — thousand dollars!" The elder man turned away with a grave face. The influence of the treasure was paramount.

When he had placed one of the chairs against the unprotected door at an angle which would prevent any easy or noiseless intrusion, Demorest threw himself on his bunk without undressing, and turned his face towards the single window of the cabin that looked towards the east. He did not appre-

hend another covert attempt against the gold. He did not fear a robbery with force and arms, although he was satisfied that there was more than one concerned in it, but this he attributed only to the encumbering weight of their expected booty. He simply waited for the dawn. It was some time before his eyes were greeted with the vague opaline brightness of the firmament which meant the vanishing of the pallid snow-line before the coming day. A bird twittered on the roof. The air was chill; he drew his blanket around him. Then he closed his eyes, he fancied only for a moment, but when he opened them the door was standing open in the strong daylight. He sprang to his feet, but the next moment he saw it was only Stacy who had passed out, and was returning fully dressed, bringing water from the spring to fill the kettle. But Stacy's face was so grave that, recalling his disturbed sleep, Demorest laughingly inquired if he had been haunted by the treasure. But to his surprise Stacy put down the kettle, and, with a hurried glance at the still sleeping Barker, said in a low voice: —

“I want you to do something for me without asking why. Later I will tell you.”

Demorest looked at him fixedly. “What is it?” he said.

“The pack-mules will be here in a few moments. Don’t wait to close up or put away anything here, but clap that gold in the saddle-bags, and take Barker with you and ‘lite’ out for Boomville *at once*. I will overtake you later.”

“Is there no time to discuss this?” asked Demorest.

“No,” said Stacy bluntly. “Call me a crank, say I’m in a blue funk” — his compressed lips and sharp black eyes did not lend themselves much to that hypothesis — “only get out of this with that stuff, and take Barker with you! I’m not responsible for myself while it’s here.”

Demorest knew Stacy to be combative, but practical. If he had not been assured of his partner’s last night slumbers he might have thought he knew of the attempt. Or if he had discovered the turned-up ground in the rear of the cabin his curiosity would have demanded an explanation. Demorest paused only for a moment, and said, “Very well, I will go.”

“ Good ! I ’ll rouse out Barker, but not a word to him — except that he must go.”

The rousing out of Barker consisted of Stacy’s lifting that young gentleman bodily from his bunk and standing him upright in the open doorway. But Barker was accustomed to this Spartan process, and after a moment’s balancing with closed lids like an unwrapped mummy, he sat down in the doorway and began to dress. He at first demurred to their departure except all together — it was so unfraternal ; but eventually he allowed himself to be persuaded out of it and into his clothes. For Barker had also had *his* visions in the night, one of which was that they should build a beautiful villa on the site of the old cabin and solemnly agree to come every year and pass a week in it together. “ I thought at first,” he said, sliding along the floor in search of different articles of his dress, or stopping gravely to catch them as they were thrown to him by his partners, “ that we ’d have it at Boomville, as being handier to get there ; but I ’ve concluded we ’d better have it here, a little higher up the hill, where it could be seen over the whole Black Spur

Range. When we were n't here we could use it as a Hut of Refuge for broken-down or washed-out miners or weary travelers, like those hospices in the Alps, you know, and have somebody to keep it for us. You see I've thought even of *that*, and Van Loo is the very man to take charge of it for us. You see he's got such good manners and speaks two languages. Lord! if a German or Frenchman came along, poor and distressed, Van Loo would just chip in his own language. See? You've got to think of all these details, you see, boys. And we might call it 'The Rest of the Three Partners,' or 'Three Partners' Rest.' "

"And you might begin by giving us one," said Stacy. "Dry up and drink your coffee."

"I'll draw out the plans. I've got it all in my head," continued the enthusiastic Barker, unheeding the interruption. "I'll just run out and take a look at the site, it's only right back of the cabin." But here Stacy caught him by his dangling belt as he was flying out of the door with one boot on, and thrust him down in a chair with a tin cup of coffee in his hand.

“Keep the plans in your head, Barker boy,” said Demorest, “for here are the pack mules and packer.” This was quite enough to divert the impressionable young man, who speedily finished his dressing, as a mule bearing a large pack-saddle and two enormous saddle-bags or pouches drove up before the door, led by a muleteer on a small horse. The transfer of the treasure to the saddle-bags was quickly made by their united efforts, as the first rays of the sun were beginning to paint the hillside. Shading his keen eyes with his hand, Stacy stood in the doorway and handed Demorest the two rifles. Demorest hesitated. “Had n’t *you* better keep one?” he said, looking in his partner’s eyes with his first challenge of curiosity. The sun seemed to put a humorous twinkle into Stacy’s glance as he returned, “Not much! And you’d better take my revolver with you, too. I’m feeling a little better now,” he said, looking at the saddle-bags, “but I’m not fit to be trusted yet with carnal weapons. When the other mule comes and is packed I’ll overtake you on the horse.”

A little more satisfied, although still won-

dering and perplexed, Demorest shouldered one rifle, and with Barker, who was carrying the other, followed the muleteer and his equipage down the trail. For a while he was a little ashamed of his part in this unusual spectacle of two armed men convoying a laden mule in broad daylight, but, luckily, it was too early for the Bar miners to be going to work, and as the tunnelmen were now at breakfast the trail was free of wayfarers. At the point where it crossed the main road Demorest, however, saw Steptoe and Whiskey Dick emerge from the thicket, apparently in earnest conversation. Demorest felt his repugnance and half-restrained suspicions suddenly return. Yet he did not wish to betray them before Barker, nor was he willing, in case of an emergency, to allow the young man to be entirely unprepared. Calling him to follow, he ran quickly ahead of the laden mule, and was relieved to find that, looking back, his companion had brought his rifle to a "ready," through some instinctive feeling of defense. As Steptoe and Whiskey Dick, a moment later discovering them, were evidently surprised, there seemed, however, to be no reason for fearing an out-

break. Suddenly, at a whisper from Steptoe, he and Whiskey Dick both threw up their hands, and stood still on the trail a few yards from them in a burlesque of the usual recognized attitude of helplessness, while a hoarse laugh broke from Steptoe.

“D—d if we did n’t think you were road-agents! But we see you’re only guarding your treasure. Rather fancy style for Heavy Tree Hill, ain’t it? Things must be gettin’ rough up thar to hev to take out your guns like that!”

Demorest had looked keenly at the four hands thus exhibited, and was more concerned that they bore no trace of wounds or mutilation than at the insult of the speech, particularly as he had a distinct impression that the action was intended to show him the futility of his suspicions.

“I am glad to see that if you have n’t any arms in your hands you’re not incapable of handling them,” said Demorest coolly, as he passed by them and again fell into the rear of the muleteer.

But Barker had thought the incident very funny, and laughed effusively at Whiskey Dick. “I did n’t know that Steptoe was up

to that kind of fun," he said, "and I suppose we *did* look rather rough with these guns as we ran on ahead of the mule. But then you know that when you called to me I really thought you were in for a shindy. All the same, Whiskey Dick did that 'hands up' to perfection: how he managed it I don't know, but his knees seemed to knock together as if he was in a real funk."

Demorest had thought so too, but he made no reply. How far that miserable drunkard was a forced or willing accomplice of the events of last night was part of a question that had become more and more repugnant to him as he was leaving the scene of it forever. It had come upon him, desecrating the dream he had dreamt that last night and turning its hopeful climax to bitterness. Small wonder that Barker, walking by his side, had his quick sympathies aroused, and as he saw that shadow, which they were all familiar with, but had never sought to penetrate, fall upon his companion's handsome face, even his youthful spirits yielded to it. They were both relieved when the clatter of hoofs behind them, as they reached the valley, announced the approach of Stacy. "I started

with the second mule and the last load soon after you left," he explained, "and have just passed them. I thought it better to join you and let the other load follow. Nobody will interfere with *that*."

"Then you are satisfied?" said Demorest, regarding him steadfastly.

"You bet! Look!"

He turned in his saddle and pointed to the crest of the hill they had just descended. Above the pines circling the lower slope above the bare ledges of rock and outcrop, a column of thick black smoke was rising straight as a spire in the windless air.

"That's the old shanty passing away," said Stacy complacently. "I reckon there won't be much left of it before we get to Boomville."

Demorest and Barker stared. "You fired it?" said Barker, trembling with excitement.

"Yes," said Stacy. "I could n't bear to leave the old rookery for coyotes and wild-cats to gather in, so I touched her off before I left."

"But" — said Barker.

"But," repeated Stacy composedly.

“Hallo! what’s the matter with that new plan of ‘The Rest’ that you’re going to build, eh? You don’t want them *both*.”

“And you did this rather than leave the dear old cabin to strangers?” said Barker, with kindling eyes. “Stacy, I did n’t think you had that poetry in you!”

“There’s heaps in me, Barker boy, that you don’t know, and I don’t exactly sabe myself.”

“Only,” continued the young fellow eagerly, “we ought to have *all* been there! We ought to have made a solemn rite of it, you know,—a kind of sacrifice. We ought to have poured a kind of libation on the ground!”

“I did sprinkle a little kerosene over it, I think,” returned Stacy, “just to help things along. But if you want to see her flaming, Barker, you just run back to that last corner on the road beyond the big red wood. That’s the spot for a view.”

As Barker—always devoted to a spectacle—swiftly disappeared the two men faced each other. “Well, what does it all mean?” said Demorest gravely.

“It means, old man,” said Stacy sud-

denly, "that if we had n't had nigger luck, the same blind luck that sent us that strike, you and I and that Barker over there would have been swirling in that smoke up to the sky about two hours ago!" He stopped and added in a lower, but earnest voice, "Look here, Phil! When I went out to fetch water this morning I smelt something queer. I went round to the back of the cabin and found a hole dug under the floor, and piled against the corner wall a lot of brush-wood and a can of kerosene. Some of the kerosene had been already poured on the brush. Everything was ready to light, and only my coming out an hour earlier had frightened the devils away. The idea was to set the place on fire, suffocate us in the smoke of the kerosene poured into the hole, and then to rush in and grab the treasure. It was a systematic plan!"

"No!" said Demorest quietly.

"No?" repeated Stacy. "I told you I saw the whole thing and took away the kerosene, which I hid, and after you had gone used it to fire the cabin with, to see if the ones I suspected would gather to watch their work."

"It was no part of their *first* plan," said Demorest, "which was only robbery. Listen!" He hurriedly recounted his experience of the preceding night to the astonished Stacy. "No, the fire was an afterthought and revenge," he added sternly.

"But you say you cut the robber in the hand; there would be no difficulty in identifying him by that."

"I wounded only a *hand*," said Demorest. "But there was a *head* in that attempt that I never saw." He then revealed his own half-suspicious, but how they were apparently refuted by the bravado of Step-toe and Whiskey Dick.

"Then that was the reason *they* didn't gather at the fire," said Stacy quickly.

"Ah!" said Demorest, "then *you* too suspected them?"

Stacy hesitated, and then said abruptly, "Yes."

Demorest was silent for a moment. "Why didn't you tell me this this morning?" he said gently.

Stacy pointed to the distant Barker. "I didn't want you to tell him. I thought it better for one partner to keep a secret from

two than for the two to keep it from one. Why did n't you tell me of your experience last night?"

"I am afraid it was for the same reason," said Demorest, with a faint smile. "And it sometimes seems to me, Jim, that we ought to imitate Barker's frankness. In our dread of tainting him with our own knowledge of evil we are sending him out into the world very poorly equipped, for all his three hundred thousand dollars."

"I reckon you're right," said Stacy briefly, extending his hand. "Shake on that!"

The two men grasped each other's hands.

"And he's no fool, either," continued Demorest. "When we met Steptoe on the road, without a word from me, he closed up alongside, with his hand on the lock of his rifle. And I had n't the heart to praise him or laugh it off."

Nevertheless they were both silent as the object of their criticism bounded down the trail towards them. He had seen the funeral pyre. It was awfully sad, it was awfully lovely, but there was something grand in it! Who could have thought Stacy could be so

poetic? But he wanted to tell them something else that was mighty pretty.

“What was it?” said Demorest.

“Well,” said Barker, “don’t laugh! But you know that Jack Hamlin? Well, boys, he’s been hovering around us on his mustang, keeping us and that pack-mule in sight ever since we left. Sometimes he’s on a side trail off to the right, sometimes off to the left, but always at the same distance. I didn’t like to tell you, boys, for I thought you’d laugh at me; but I think, you know, he’s taken a sort of shine to us since he dropped in last night. And I fancy, you see, he’s sort of hanging round to see that we get along all right. I’d have pointed him out before only I reckoned you and Stacy would say he was making up to us for our money.”

“And we’d have been wrong, Barker boy,” said Stacy, with a heartiness that surprised Demorest, “for I reckon your instinct’s the right one.”

“There he is now,” said the gratified Barker, “just abreast of us on the cut-off. He started just after we did, and he’s got a horse that could have brought him into

Boomville hours ago. It's just his kindness."

He pointed to a distant fringe of buckeye from which Jack Hanlin had just emerged. Although evidently holding in a powerful mustang, nothing could be more unconscious and utterly indifferent than his attitude. He did not seem to know of the proximity of any other traveler, and to care less. His handsome head was slightly thrown back, as if he was caroling after his usual fashion, but the distance was too great to make his melody audible to them, or to allow Barker's shout of invitation to reach him. Suddenly he lowered his tightened rein, the mustang sprang forward, and with a flash of silver spurs and bridle fripperies he had disappeared. But as the trail he was pursuing crossed theirs a mile beyond, it seemed quite possible that they should again meet him.

They were now fairly into the Boomville valley, and were entering a narrow arroyo bordered with dusky willows which effectually excluded the view on either side. It was the bed of a mountain torrent that in winter descended the hillside over the trail by which they had just come, but was now

sunk into the thirsty plain between banks that varied from two to five feet in height. The muleteer had advanced into the narrow channel when he suddenly cast a hurried glance behind him, uttered a "Madre de Dios!" and backed his mule and his precious freight against the bank. The sound of hoofs on the trail in their rear had caught his quicker ear, and as the three partners turned they beheld three horsemen thundering down the hill towards them. They were apparently Mexican vaqueros of the usual common swarthy type, their faces made still darker by the black silk handkerchief tied round their heads under their stiff sombreros. Either they were unable or unwilling to restrain their horses in their headlong speed, and a collision in that narrow passage was imminent, but suddenly, before reaching its entrance, they diverged with a volley of oaths, and dashing along the left bank of the arroyo, disappeared in the intervening willows. Divided between relief at their escape and indignation at what seemed to be a drunken, feast-day freak of these roystering vaqueros, the little party re-formed, when a cry from Barker arrested them. He had

just perceived a horseman motionless in the arroyo who, although unnoticed by them, had evidently been seen by the Mexicans. He had apparently leaped into it from the bank, and had halted as if to witness this singular incident. As the clatter of the vaqueros' hoofs died away he lightly leaped the bank again and disappeared. But in that single glimpse of him they recognized Jack Hamlin. When they reached the spot where he had halted, they could see that he must have approached it from the trail where they had previously seen him, but which they now found crossed it at right angles. Barker was right. He had really kept them at easy distance the whole length of the journey.

But they were now reaching its end. When they issued at last from the arroyo they came upon the outskirts of Boomville and the great stage-road. Indeed, the six horses of the Pioneer coach were just panting along the last half mile of the steep upgrade as they approached. They halted mechanically as the heavy vehicle swayed and creaked by them. In their ordinary working dress, sunburnt with exposure, cov-

ered with dust, and carrying their rifles still in their hands, they, perhaps, presented a sufficiently characteristic appearance to draw a few faces — some of them pretty and intelligent — to the windows of the coach as it passed. The sensitive Barker was quickest to feel that resentment with which the Pioneer usually met the wide-eyed criticism of the Eastern tourist or “greenhorn,” and reddened under the bold scrutiny of a pair of black inquisitive eyes behind an eyeglass. That annoyance was communicated, though in a lesser degree, even to the bearded Demorest and Stacy. It was an unexpected contact with that great world in which they were so soon to enter. They felt ashamed of their appearance, and yet ashamed of that feeling. They felt a secret satisfaction when Barker said, “They ’d open their eyes wider if they knew what was in that pack-saddle,” and yet they corrected him for what they were pleased to call his “snobbishness.” They hurried a little faster as the road became more frequented, as if eager to shorten their distance to clean clothes and civilization.

Only Demorest began to linger in the

rear. This contact with the stagecoach had again brought him face to face with his buried past. He felt his old dream revive, and occasionally turned to look back upon the dark outlines of Black Spur, under whose shadow it had returned so often, and wondered if he had left it there forever, and it were now slowly exhaling with the thinned and dying smoke of their burning cabin.

His companions, knowing his silent moods, had preceded him at some distance, when he heard the soft sound of ambling hoofs on the thick dust, and suddenly the light touch of Jack Hamlin's gauntlet on his shoulder. The mustang Jack bestrode was reeking with grime and sweat, but Jack himself was as immaculate and fresh as ever. With a delightful affectation of embarrassment and timidity he began flicking the side buttons of his velvet vaquero trousers with the thong of his riata. "I reckoned to sling a word along with you before you went," he said, looking down, "but I'm so shy that I could n't do it in company. So I thought I'd get it off on you while you were alone."

"We've seen you once or twice before,

this morning," said Demorest pleasantly, "and we were sorry you did n't join us."

"I reckon I might have," said Jack gayly, "if my horse had only made up his mind whether ne was a bird or a squirrel, and had n't been so various and promiscuous about whether he wanted to climb a tree or fly. He's not a bad horse for a Mexican piug, only when he thinks there is any devilment around he wants to wade in and take a hand. However, I reckoned to see the last of you and your pile into Boomville. And I *did*. When I meet three fellows like you that are clean white all through I sort of cotton to 'em, even if *I'm* a little of a brunette myself. And I've got something to give you."

He took from a fold of his scarlet sash a small parcel neatly folded in white paper as fresh and spotless as himself. Holding it in his fingers, he went on: "I happened to be at Heavy Tree Hill early this morning before sun-up. In the darkness I struck your cabin, and I reckon—I struck somebody else! At first I thought it was one of you chaps down on your knees praying at the rear of the cabin, but the way the fellow lit

out when he smelt me coming made me think it was n't entirely fasting and prayer. However, I went to the rear of the cabin, and then I reckoned some kind friend had been bringing you kindlings and firewood for your early breakfast. But that did n't satisfy me, so I knelt down as he had knelt, and then I saw—well, Mr. Demorest, I reckon I saw *just what you have seen!* But even then I was n't quite satisfied, for that man had been grubbing round as if searching for something. So I searched too—and I found *it*. I've got it here. I'm going to give it to you, for it may some day come in handy, and you won't find anything like it among the folks where you're going. It's something unique, as those fine-art-collecting sharps in 'Frisco say—something quite matchless, unless you try to match it one day yourself! Don't open the paper until I run on and say 'So long' to your partners. Good-by."

He grasped Demorest's hand and then dropped the little packet into his palm, and ambled away towards Stacy and Barker. Holding the packet in his hand with an amused yet puzzled smile, Demorest watched

the gambler give Stacy's hand a hearty farewell shake and a supplementary slap on the back to the delighted Barker, and then vanish in a flash of red sash and silver buttons. At which Demorest, walking slowly towards his partners, opened the packet, and stood suddenly still. It contained the dried and bloodless second finger of a human hand cut off at the first joint!

For an instant he held it at arm's length, as if about to cast it away. Then he grimly replaced it in the paper, put it carefully in his pocket, and silently walked after his companions.

CHAPTER I.

A STRONG southwester was beating against the windows and doors of Stacy's Bank in San Francisco, and spreading a film of rain between the regular splendors of its mahogany counters and sprucely dressed clerks and the usual passing pedestrian. For Stacy's new banking-house had long since received the epithet of "palatial" from an enthusiastic local press fresh from the "opening" luncheon in its richly decorated directors' rooms, and it was said that once a homely would-be depositor from One Horse Gulch was so cowed by its magnificence that his heart failed him at the last moment, and mumbling an apology to the elegant receiving teller, fled with his greasy chamois pouch of gold-dust to deposit his treasure in the dingy Mint around the corner. Perhaps there was something of this feeling, mingled with a certain simple-minded fascination, in the hesitation of a stranger

of a higher class who entered the bank that rainy morning and finally tendered his card to the important negro messenger.

The card preceded him through noiselessly swinging doors and across heavily carpeted passages until it reached the inner core of Mr. James Stacy's private offices, and was respectfully laid before him. He was not alone. At his side, in an attitude of polite and studied expectancy, stood a correct-looking young man, for whom Mr. Stacy was evidently writing a memorandum. The stranger glanced furtively at the card with a curiosity hardly in keeping with his suggested good breeding; but Stacy did not look at it until he had finished his memorandum.

"There," he said, with business decision, "you can tell your people that if we carry their new debentures over our limit we will expect a larger margin. Ditches are not what they were three years ago when miners were willing to waste their money over your rates. They don't gamble *that way* any more, and your company ought to know it, and not gamble themselves over that prospect." He handed the paper to the stranger,

who bowed over it with studied politeness, and backed towards the door. Stacy took up the waiting card, read it, said to the messenger, "Show him in," and in the same breath turned to his guest: "I say, Van Loo, it's George Barker! You know him."

"Yes," said Van Loo, with a polite hesitation as he halted at the door. "He was—I think—er—in your employ at Heavy Tree Hill."

"Nonsense! He was my *partner*. And you must have known him since at Boomville. Come! He got forty shares of Ditch stock—through you—at 110, which were worth about 80! *Somebody* must have made money enough by it to remember him."

"I was only speaking of him socially," said Van Loo, with a deprecating smile. "You know he married a young woman—the hotel-keeper's daughter, who used to wait at the table—and after my mother and sister came out to keep house for me at Boomville it was quite impossible for me to see much of him, for he seldom went out without his wife, you know."

"Yes," said Stacy dryly, "I think you

did n't like his marriage. But I'm glad your disinclination to see him is n't on account of that deal in stocks."

"Oh no," said Van Loo. "Good-by."

But, unfortunately, in the next passage he came upon Barker, who with a cry of unfeigned pleasure, none the less sincere that he was feeling a little alien in these impressive surroundings, recognized him. Nothing could exceed Van Loo's protest of delight at the meeting; nothing his equal desolation at the fact that he was hastening to another engagement. "But your old partner," he added, with a smile, "is waiting for you; he has just received your card, and I should be only keeping you from him. So glad to see you; you're looking so well. Good-by! Good-by!"

Reassured, Barker no longer hesitated, but dashed with his old impetuosity into his former partner's room. Stacy, already deeply absorbed in other business, was sitting with his back towards him, and Barker's arms were actually encircling his neck before the astonished and half-angry man looked up. But when his eyes met the laughing gray ones of Barker above him he

gently disengaged himself with a quick return of the caress, rose, shut the door of an inner office, and returning pushed Barker into an armchair in quite the old suppressive fashion of former days. Yes; it was the same Stacy that Barker looked at, albeit his brown beard was now closely cropped around his determined mouth and jaw in a kind of grave decorum, and his energetic limbs already attuned to the rigor of clothes of fashionable cut and still more rigorous sombreness of color.

“Barker boy,” he began, with the familiar twinkle in his keen eyes which the younger partner remembered, “I don’t encourage stag dancing among my young men during bank hours, and you’ll please to remember that we are not on Heavy Tree Hill” —

“Where,” broke in Barker enthusiastically, “we were only overlooked by the Black Spur Range and the Sierran snow-line; where the nearest voice that came to you was quarter of a mile away as the crow flies and nearly a mile by the trail.”

“And was generally an oath!” said Stacy. “But you’re in San Francisco *now*. Where are you stopping?” He took up a

pencil and held it over a memorandum pad awaitingly.

“At the Brook House. It’s” —

“Hold on! ‘Brook House,’” Stacy repeated as he jotted it down. “And for how long?”

“Oh, a day or two. You see, Kitty” —

Stacy checked him with a movement of his pencil in the air, and then wrote down, “‘Day or two.’ Wife with you?”

“Yes; and oh, Stacy, our boy! Ah!” he went on, with a laugh, knocking aside the remonstrating pencil, “you must listen! He’s just the sweetest, knowingest little chap living. Do you know what we’re going to christen him? Well, he’ll be Stacy Demorest Barker. Good names, aren’t they? And then it perpetuates the dear old friendship.”

Stacy picked up the pencil again, wrote “Wife and child S. D. B.,” and leaned back in his chair. “Now, Barker,” he said briefly, “I’m coming to dine with you to-night at 7.30 sharp. *Then* we’ll talk Heavy Tree Hill, wife, baby, and S. D. B. But here I’m all for business. Have you any with me?”

Barker, who was easily amused, had extracted a certain entertainment out of Stacy's memorandum, but he straightened himself with a look of eager confidence and said, "Certainly; that's just what it is — business. Lord! Stacy, I'm *all* business now. I'm in everything. And I bank with you, though perhaps you don't know it; it's in your Branch at Marysville. I did n't want to say anything about it to you before. But Lord! you don't suppose that I'd bank anywhere else while you are in the business — checks, dividends, and all that; but in this matter I felt you knew, old chap. I did n't want to talk to a banker nor to a bank, but to Jim Stacy, my old partner."

"Barker," said Stacy curtly, "how much money are you short of?"

At this direct question Barker's always quick color rose, but, with an equally quick smile, he said, "I don't know yet that I'm short at all."

"But *I* do!"

"Look here, Jim: why, I'm just overloaded with shares and stocks," said Barker, smiling.

"Not one of which you could realize on

without sacrifice. Barker, three years ago you had three hundred thousand dollars put to your account at San Francisco."

"Yes," said Barker, with a quiet reminiscent laugh. "I remember I wanted to draw it out in one check to see how it would look."

"And you've drawn out all in three years, and it looks d--d bad."

"How did you know it?" asked Barker, his face beaming only with admiration of his companion's omniscience.

"How did I know it?" retorted Stacy. "I know *you*, and I know the kind of people who have unloaded to you."

"Come, Stacy," said Barker, "I've only invested in shares and stocks like everybody else, and then only on the best advice I could get: like Van Loo's, for instance, — that man who was here just now, the new manager of the Empire Ditch Company; and Carter's, my own Kitty's father. And when I was offered fifty thousand Wide West Extensions, and was hesitating over it, he told me *you* were in it too — and that was enough for me to buy it."

"Yes, but we did n't go into it at his figures."

“No,” said Barker, with an eager smile, “but you *sold* at his figures, for I knew that when I found that *you*, my old partner, was in it; don’t you see, I preferred to buy it through your bank, and did at 110. Of course, you would n’t have sold it at that figure if it was n’t worth it then, and neither I nor you are to blame if it dropped the next week to 60, don’t you see?”

Stacy’s eyes hardened for a moment as he looked keenly into his former partner’s bright gray ones, but there was no trace of irony in Barker’s. On the contrary, a slight shade of sadness came over them. “No,” he said reflectively, “I don’t think I’ve ever been foolish or followed out my *own* ideas, except once, and that was extravagant, I admit. That was my idea of building a kind of refuge, you know, on the site of our old cabin, where poor miners and played-out prospectors waiting for a strike could stay without paying anything. Well, I sunk twenty thousand dollars in that, and might have lost more, only Carter — Kitty’s father — persuaded me — he’s an awful clever old fellow — into turning it into a kind of branch hotel of Boomville, while

using it as a hotel to take poor chaps who could n't pay, at half prices, or quarter prices, *privately*, don't you see, so as to spare their pride, — awfully pretty, was n't it? — and make the hotel profit by it."

"Well?" said Stacy as Barker paused.

"They did n't come," said Barker. "But," he added eagerly, "it shows that things were better than I had imagined. Only the others did not come, either."

"And you lost your twenty thousand dollars," said Stacy curtly.

"*Fifty* thousand," said Barker, "for of course it had to be a larger hotel than the other. And I think that Carter would n't have gone into it except to save me from losing money."

"And yet made you lose fifty thousand instead of twenty. For I don't suppose *he* advanced anything."

"He gave his time and experience," said Barker simply.

"I don't think it worth thirty thousand dollars," said Stacy dryly. "But all this does n't tell me what your business is with me to-day."

"No," said Barker, brightening up, "but

it is business, you know. Something in the old style — as between partner and partner — and that's why I came to *you*, and not to the 'banker.' And it all comes out of something that Demorest once told us; so you see it's all us three again! Well, you know, of course, that the Excelsior Ditch Company have abandoned the Bar and Heavy Tree Hill. It did n't pay."

"Yes; nor does the company pay any dividends now. You ought to know, with fifty thousand of their stock on your hands."

Barker laughed. "But listen. I found that I could buy up their whole plant and all the ditching along the Black Spur Range for ten thousand dollars."

"And Great Scott! you don't think of taking up their business?" said Stacy, aghast.

Barker laughed more heartily. "No. Not their business. But I remember that once Demorest told us, in the dear old days, that it cost nearly as much to make a water ditch as a railroad, in the way of surveying and engineering and levels, you know. And here's the plant for a railroad. Don't you see?"

“But a railroad from Black Spur to Heavy Tree Hill — what’s the good of that?”

“Why, Black Spur will be in the line of the new Divide Railroad they’re trying to get a bill for in the legislature.”

“An infamous piece of wildeat jobbing that will never pass,” said Stacy decisively.

“They said *because* it was that, it would pass,” said Barker simply. “They say that Watson’s Bank is in it, and is bound to get it through. And as that is a rival bank of yours, don’t you see, I thought that if *we* could get something real good or valuable out of it, — something that would do the Black Spur good, — it would be all right.”

“And was your business to consult me about it?” said Stacy bluntly.

“No,” said Barker, “it’s too late to consult you now, though I wish I had. I’ve given my word to take it, and I can’t back out. But I have n’t the ten thousand dollars, and I came to you.”

Stacy slowly settled himself back in his chair, and put both hands in his pockets.

“Not a cent, Barker, not a cent.”

“I’m not asking it of the *bank*,” said

Barker, with a smile, "for I could have gone to the bank for it. But as this was something between us, I am asking you, Stacy, as my old partner."

"And I am answering you, Barker, as your old partner, but also as the partner of a hundred other men, who have even a greater right to ask me. And my answer is, not a cent!"

Barker looked at him with a pale, astonished face and slightly parted lips. Stacy rose, thrust his hands deeper in his pockets, and standing before him went on:—

"Now look here! It's time you should understand me and yourself. Three years ago, when our partnership was dissolved by accident, or mutual consent, we will say, we started afresh, each on our own hook. Through foolishness and bad advice you have in those three years hopelessly involved yourself as you never would have done had we been partners, and yet in your difficulty you ask me and my new partners to help you out of a difficulty in which they have no concern."

"Your *new* partners?" stammered Barker.

“Yes, my new partners; for every man who has a share, or a deposit, or an interest, or a dollar in this bank is my *partner* — even you, with your securities at the Branch, are one; and you may say that in *this* I am protecting you against yourself.”

“But you have money — you have private means.”

“None to speculate with as you wish me to — on account of my position; none to give away foolishly as you expect me to — on account of precedent and example. I am a soulless machine taking care of capital intrusted to me and my brains, but decidedly *not* to my heart nor my sentiment. So my answer is, not a cent!”

Barker's face had changed; his color had come back, but with an older expression. Presently, however, his beaming smile returned, with the additional suggestion of an affectionate toleration which puzzled Stacy.

“I believe you're right, old chap,” he said, extending his hand to the banker, “and I wish I had talked to you before. But it's too late now, and I've given my word.”

“Your *word!*” said Stacy. “Have you no written agreement?”

“No. My word was accepted.” He blushed slightly as if conscious of a great weakness.

“But that is n’t legal nor business. And you could n’t even hold the Ditch Company to it if *they* chose to back out.”

“But I don’t think they will,” said Barker simply. “And you see my word was n’t given entirely to *them*. I bought the thing through my wife’s cousin, Henry Spring, a broker, and he makes something by it, from the company, on commission. And I can’t go back on *him*. What did you say?”

Stacy had only groaned through his set teeth. “Nothing,” he said briefly, “except that I’m coming, as I said before, to dine with you to-night; but no more *business*. I’ve enough of that with others, and there are some waiting for me in the outer office now.”

Barker rose at once, but with the same affectionate smile and tender gravity of countenance, and laid his hand caressingly on Stacy’s shoulder. “It’s like you to give up so much of your time to me and my foolishness and be so frank with me. And I know it’s mighty rough on you to have to be a

mere machine instead of Jim Stacy. Don't you bother about me. I'll sell some of my Wide West Extension and pull the thing through myself. It's all right, but I'm sorry for you, old chap." He glanced around the room at the walls and rich paneling, and added, "I suppose that's what you have to pay for all this sort of thing?"

Before Stacy could reply, a waiting visitor was announced for the second time, and Barker, with another hand-shake and a reassuring smile to his old partner, passed into the hall, as if the onus of any infelicity in the interview was upon himself alone. But Stacy did not seem to be in a particularly accessible mood to the new caller, who in his turn appeared to be slightly irritated by having been kept waiting over some irksome business. "You don't seem to follow me," he said to Stacy after reciting his business perplexity. "Can't you suggest something?"

"Well, why don't you get hold of one of your board of directors?" said Stacy abstractedly. "There's Captain Drummond; you and he are old friends. You were comrades in the Mexican War, were n't you?"

"That be d—d!" said his visitor bitterly.

“ All his interests are the other way, and in a trade of this kind, you know, Stacy, that a man would sacrifice his own brother. Do you suppose that he'd let up on a sure thing that he's got just because he and I fought side by side at Cerro Gordo? Come! what are you giving us? You're the last man I ever expected to hear that kind of flapdoodle from. If it's because your bank has got some other interest and you can't advise me, why don't you say so? ” Nevertheless, in spite of Stacy's abrupt disclaimer, he left a few minutes later, half convinced that Stacy's lukewarmness was due to some adverse influence. Other callers were almost as quickly disposed of, and at the end of an hour Stacy found himself again alone.

But not apparently in a very satisfied mood. After a few moments of purely mechanical memoranda-making, he rose abruptly and opened a small drawer in a cabinet, from which he took a letter still in its envelope. It bore a foreign postmark. Glancing over it hastily, his eyes at last became fixed on a concluding paragraph. “ I hope,” wrote his correspondent, “ that even in the rush of your big business you will sometimes look

after Barker. Not that I think the dear old chap will ever go wrong — indeed, I often wish I was as certain of myself as of him and his insight; but I am afraid we were more inclined to be merely amused and tolerant of his wonderful trust and simplicity than to really understand it for his own good and ours. I know you did not like his marriage, and were inclined to believe he was the victim of a rather unscrupulous father and a foolish, unequal girl; but are you satisfied that he would have been the happier without it, or lived his perfect life under other and what you may think wiser conditions? If he *wrote* the poetry that he *lives* everybody would think him wonderful; for being what he is we never give him sufficient credit." Stacy smiled grimly, and penciled on his memorandum, "He wants it to the amount of ten thousand dollars." "Anyhow," continued the writer, "look after him, Jim, for his sake, your sake, and the sake of — PHIL DEMOREST."

Stacy put the letter back in its envelope, and tossing it grimly aside went on with his calculations. Presently he stopped, restored the letter to his cabinet, and rang a bell on

his table. "Send Mr. North here," he said to the negro messenger. In a few moments his chief book-keeper appeared in the doorway.

"Turn to the Branch ledger and bring me a statement of Mr. George Barker's account."

"He was here a moment ago," said North, essaying a confidential look towards his chief.

"I know it," said Stacy coolly, without looking up.

"He's been running a good deal on wild-cat lately," suggested North.

"I asked for his account, and not your opinion of it," said Stacy shortly.

The subordinate withdrew somewhat abashed but still curious, and returned presently with a ledger which he laid before his chief. Stacy ran his eyes over the list of Barker's securities; it seemed to him that all the wildest schemes of the past year stared him in the face. His finger, however, stopped on the Wide West Extension. "Mr. Barker will be wanting to sell some of this stock. What is it quoted at now?"

"Sixty."

“But I would prefer that Mr. Barker should not offer in the open market at present. Give him seventy for it—private sale; that will be ten thousand dollars paid to his credit. Advise the Branch of this at once, and to keep the transaction quiet.”

“Yes, sir,” responded the clerk as he moved towards the door. But he hesitated, and with another essay at confidence said insinuatingly, “I always thought, sir, that Wide West would recover.”

Stacy, perhaps not displeased to find what had evidently passed in his subordinate's mind, looked at him and said dryly, “Then I would advise you also to keep that opinion to yourself.” But, clever as he was, he had not anticipated the result. Mr. North, though a trusted employee, was human. On arriving in the outer office he beckoned to one of the lounging brokers, and in a low voice said, “I'll take two shares of Wide West, if you can get it cheap.”

The broker's face became alert and eager. “Yes, but I say, is anything up?”

“I'm not here to give the business of the bank away,” retorted North severely; “take the order or leave it.”

The man hurried away. Having thus vindicated his humanity by also passing the snub he had received from Stacy to an inferior, he turned away to carry out his master's instructions, yet secure in the belief that he had profited by his superior discernment of the real reason of that master's singular conduct. But when he returned to the private room, in hopes of further revelations, Mr. Stacy was closeted with another financial magnate, and had apparently divested his mind of the whole affair.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN George Barker returned to the outer ward of the financial stronghold he had penetrated, with its curving sweep of counters, brass railings, and wirework screens defended by the spruce clerks behind them, he was again impressed with the position of the man he had just quitted, and for a moment hesitated, with an inclination to go back. It was with no idea of making a further appeal to his old comrade, but — what would have been odd in any other nature but his — he was affected by a sense that *he* might have been unfair and selfish in his manner to the man panoplied by these defenses, and who was in a measure forced to be a part of them. He would like to have returned and condoled with him. The clerks, who were heartlessly familiar with the anxious bearing of the men who sought interviews with their chief, both before and after, smiled with the whispered conviction that the fresh

and ingenuous young stranger had been "chucked" like others until they met his kindly, tolerant, and even superior eyes, and were puzzled. Meanwhile Barker, who had that sublime, natural quality of abstraction over small impertinences which is more exasperating than studied indifference, after his brief hesitation passed out unconcernedly through the swinging mahogany doors into the blowy street. Here the wind and rain revived him; the bank and its curt refusal were forgotten; he walked onward with only a smiling memory of his partner as in the old days. He remembered how Stacy had burned down their old cabin rather than have it fall into sordid or unworthy hands — this Stacy who was now condemned to sink his impulses and become a mere machine. He had never known Stacy's real motive for that act, — both Demorest and Stacy had kept their knowledge of the attempted robbery from their younger partner, — it always seemed to him to be a precious revelation of Stacy's inner nature. Facing the wind and rain, he recalled how Stacy, though never so enthusiastic about his marriage as Demorest, had taken up Van

Loo sharply for some foolish sneer about his own youthfulness. He was affectionately tolerant of even Stacy's dislike to his wife's relations, for Stacy did not know them as he did. Indeed, Barker, whose own father and mother had died in his infancy, had accepted his wife's relations with a loving trust and confidence that was supreme, from the fact that he had never known any other.

At last he reached his hotel. It was a new one, the latest creation of a feverish progress in hotel-building which had covered five years and as many squares with large showy erections, utterly beyond the needs of the community, yet each superior in size and adornment to its predecessor. It struck him as being the one evidence of an abiding faith in the future of the metropolis that he had seen in nothing else. As he entered its frescoed hall that afternoon he was suddenly reminded, by its challenging opulency, of the bank he had just quitted, without knowing that the bank had really furnished its capital and its original design. The gilded bar-rooms, flashing with mirrors and cut glass; the saloons, with their desert expanse of Turkey carpet and oasis of clustered

divans and gilded tables ; the great dining-room, with porphyry columns, and walls and ceilings shining with allegory — all these things which had attracted his youthful wonder without distracting his correct simplicity of taste he now began to comprehend. It was the bank's money "at work." In the clatter of dishes in the dining-room he even seemed to hear again the chinking of coin.

It was a short cut to his apartments to pass through a smaller public sitting-room popularly known as "Flirtation Camp," where eight or ten couples generally found refuge on chairs and settees by the windows, half concealed by heavy curtains. But the occupants were by no means youthful spinsters or bachelors ; they were generally married women, guests of the hotel, receiving other people's husbands whose wives were "in the States," or responsible middle-aged leaders of the town. In the elaborate toilettes of the women, as compared with the less formal business suits of the men, there was an odd mingling of the social attitude with perhaps more mysterious confidences. The idle gossip about them had never affected Barker ; rather he had that innate

respect for the secrets of others which is as inseparable from simplicity as it is from high breeding, and he scarcely glanced at the different couples in his progress through the room. He did not even notice a rather striking and handsome woman, who, surrounded by two or three admirers, yet looked up at Barker as he passed with self-conscious lids as if seeking a return of her glance. But he moved on abstractedly, and only stopped when he suddenly saw the familiar skirt of his wife at a further window, and halted before it.

“Oh, it's *you*,” said Mrs. Barker, with a half-nervous, half-impatient laugh. “Why, I thought you'd certainly stay half the afternoon with your old partner, considering that you have n't met for three years.”

There was no doubt she *had* thought so; there was equally no doubt that the conversation she was carrying on with her companion — a good-looking, portly business man — was effectually interrupted. But Barker did not notice it. “Captain Heath, my husband,” she went on, carelessly rising and smoothing her skirts. The captain, who had risen too, bowed vaguely at the

introduction, but Barker extended his hand frankly. "I found Stacy busy," he said in answer to his wife, "but he is coming to dine with us to-night."

"If you mean Jim Stacy, the banker," said Captain Heath, brightening into greater ease, "he's the busiest man in California. I've seen men standing in a queue outside his door as in the old days at the post-office. And he only gives you five minutes and no extension. So you and he were partners once?" he said, looking curiously at the still youthful Barker.

But it was Mrs. Barker who answered, "Oh yes! and always such good friends. I was awfully jealous of him." Nevertheless, she did not respond to the affectionate protest in Barker's eyes nor to the laugh of Captain Heath, but glanced indifferently around the room as if to leave further conversation to the two men. It was possible that she was beginning to feel that Captain Heath was as *de trop* now as her husband had been a moment before. Standing there, however, between them both, idly tracing a pattern on the carpet with the toe of her slipper, she looked prettier than she had

ever looked as Kitty Carter. Her slight figure was more fully developed. That artificial severity covering a natural virgin coyness with which she used to wait at table in her father's hotel at Boomville had gone, and was replaced by a satisfied consciousness of her power to please. Her glance was freer, but not as frank as in those days. Her dress was undoubtedly richer and more stylish; yet Barker's loyal heart often reverted fondly to the chintz gown, coquettishly frilled apron, and spotless cuffs and collar in which she had handed him his coffee with a faint color that left his own face crimson.

Captain Heath's tact being equal to her indifference, he had excused himself, although he was becoming interested in this youthful husband. But Mrs. Barker, after having asserted her husband's distinction as the equal friend of the millionaire, was by no means willing that the captain should be further interested in Barker for himself alone, and did not urge him to stay. As he departed she turned to her husband, and, indicating the group he had passed the moment before, said: —

“That horrid woman has been staring at us all the time. I don’t see what you see in her to admire.”

Poor Barker’s admiration had been limited to a few words of civility in the enforced contact of that huge caravansary and in his quiet, youthful recognition of her striking personality. But he was just then too pre-occupied with his interview with Stacy to reply, and perhaps he did not quite understand his wife. It was odd how many things he did not quite understand now about Kitty, but that he knew must be *his* fault. But Mrs. Barker apparently did not require, after the fashion of her sex, a reply. For the next moment, as they moved towards their rooms, she said impatiently, “Well, you don’t tell what Stacy said. Did you get the money?”

I grieve to say that this soul of truth and frankness lied — only to his wife. Perhaps he considered it only lying to *himself*, a thing of which he was at times miserably conscious. “It was n’t necessary, dear,” he said; “he advised me to sell my securities in the bank; and if you only knew how dreadfully busy he is.”

Mrs. Barker curled her pretty lip. "It does n't take very long to lend ten thousand dollars!" she said. "But that's what I always tell you. You have about made me sick by singing the praises of those wonderful partners of yours, and here you ask a favor of one of them and he tells you to sell your securities! And you know, and he knows, they're worth next to nothing."

"You don't understand, dear" — began Barker.

"I understand that you've given your word to poor Harry," said Mrs. Barker in pretty indignation, "who's responsible for the Ditch purchase."

"And I shall keep it. I always do," said Barker very quietly, but with that same singular expression of face that had puzzled Stacy. But Mrs. Barker, who, perhaps, knew her husband better, said in an altered voice: —

"But *how* can you, dear?"

"If I'm short a thousand or two I'll ask your father."

Mrs. Barker was silent. "Father's so very much harried now, George. Why don't you simply throw the whole thing up?"

"But I've given my word to your cousin Henry."

"Yes, but only your *word*. There was no written agreement. And you could n't even hold him to it."

Barker opened his frank eyes in astonishment. Her own cousin, too! And they were Stacy's very words!

"Besides," added Mrs. Barker audaciously, "he could get rid of it elsewhere. He had another offer, but he thought yours the best. So don't be silly."

By this time they had reached their rooms. Barker, apparently dismissing the subject from his mind with characteristic buoyancy, turned into the bedroom and walked smilingly towards a small crib which stood in the corner. "Why, he's gone!" he said in some dismay.

"Well," said Mrs. Barker a little impatiently, "you did n't expect me to take him into the public parlor, where I was seeing visitors, did you? I sent him out with the nurse into the lower hall to play with the other children."

A shade momentarily passed over Barker's face. He always looked forward to meeting

the child when he came back. He had a belief, based on no grounds whatever, that the little creature understood him. And he had a father's doubt of the wholesomeness of other people's children who were born into the world indiscriminately and not under the exceptional conditions of his own. "I'll go and fetch him," he said.

"You have n't told me anything about your interview; what you did and what your good friend Stacy said," said Mrs. Barker, dropping languidly into a chair. "And really if you are simply running away again after that child, I might just as well have asked Captain Heath to stay longer."

"Oh, as to Stacy," said Barker, dropping beside her and taking her hand; "well, dear, he was awfully busy, you know, and shut up in the innermost office like the agate in one of the Japanese nests of boxes. But," he continued, brightening up, "just the same dear old Jim Stacy of Heavy Tree Hill, when I first knew you. Lord! dear, how it all came back to me! That day I proposed to you in the belief that I was unexpectedly rich and even bought a claim for the boys on the strength of it, and how I came back

to them to find that they had made a big strike on the very claim. Lord! I remember how I was so afraid to tell them about you — and how they guessed it — that dear old Stacy one of the first.”

“Yes,” said Mrs. Barker, “and I hope your friend Stacy remembered that but for *me*, when you found out that you were not rich, you’d have given up the claim, but that I really deceived my own father to make you keep it. I’ve often worried over that, George,” she said pensively, turning a diamond bracelet around her pretty wrist, “although I never said anything about it.”

“But, Kitty darling,” said Barker, grasping his wife’s hand, “I gave my note for it; you know you said that was bargain enough, and I had better wait until the note was due, and until I found I could n’t pay, before I gave up the claim. It was very clever of you, and the boys all said so, too. But you never deceived your father, dear,” he said, looking at her gravely, “for I should have told him everything.”

“Of course, if you look at it in that way,” said his wife languidly, “it’s nothing; only I think it ought to be remembered when

people go about saying papa ruined you with his hotel schemes."

"Who dares say that?" said Barker indignantly.

"Well, if they don't *say* it they look it," said Mrs. Barker, with a toss of her pretty head, "and I believe that's at the bottom of Stacy's refusal."

"But he never said a word, Kitty," said Barker, flushing.

"There, don't excite yourself, George," said Mrs. Barker resignedly, "but go for the baby. I know you're dying to go, and I suppose it's time Norah brought it upstairs."

At any other time Barker would have lingered with explanations, but just then a deeper sense than usual of some misunderstanding made him anxious to shorten this domestic colloquy. He rose, pressed his wife's hand, and went out. But yet he was not entirely satisfied with himself for leaving her. "I suppose it is n't right my going off as soon as I come in," he murmured reproachfully to himself, "but I think she wants the baby back as much as I; only, woman-like, she did n't care to let me know it."

He reached the lower hall, which he knew was a favorite promenade for the nurses who were gathered at the farther end, where a large window looked upon Montgomery Street. But Norah, the Irish nurse, was not among them; he passed through several corridors in his search, but in vain. At last, worried and a little anxious, he turned to regain his rooms through the long saloon where he had found his wife previously. It was deserted now; the last caller had left — even frivolity had its prescribed limits. He was consequently startled by a gentle murmur from one of the heavily curtained window recesses. It was a woman's voice — low, sweet, caressing, and filled with an almost pathetic tenderness. And it was followed by a distinct gurgling satisfied crow.

Barker turned instantly in that direction. A step brought him to the curtain, where a singular spectacle presented itself.

Seated on a lounge, completely absorbed and possessed by her treasure, was the "horrid woman" whom his wife had indicated only a little while ago, holding a baby — Kitty's sacred baby — in her wanton lap!

The child was feebly grasping the end of the slender jeweled necklace which the woman held temptingly dangling from a thin white jeweled finger above it. But its eyes were beaming with an intense delight, as if trying to respond to the deep, concentrated love in the handsome face that was bent above it.

At the sudden intrusion of Barker she looked up. There was a faint rise in her color, but no loss of self-possession.

"Please don't scold the nurse," she said, "nor say anything to Mrs. Barker. It is all my fault. I thought that both the nurse and child looked dreadfully bored with each other, and I borrowed the little fellow for a while to try and amuse him. At least I have n't made him cry, have I, dear?" The last epithet, it is needless to say, was addressed to the little creature in her lap, but in its tender modulation it touched the father's quick sympathies as if he had shared it with the child. "You see," she said softly, disengaging the baby fingers from her necklace, "that *our* sex is not the only one tempted by jewelry and glitter."

Barker hesitated; the Madonna-like devotion of a moment ago was gone; it was only

the woman of the world who laughingly looked up at him. Nevertheless he was touched. "Have you — ever — had a child, Mrs. Horncastle?" he asked gently and hesitatingly. He had a vague recollection that she passed for a widow, and in his simple eyes all women were virgins or married saints.

"No," she said abruptly. Then she added with a laugh, "Or perhaps I should not admire them so much. I suppose it's the same feeling bachelors have for other people's wives. But I know you're dying to take that boy from me. Take him, then, and don't be ashamed to carry him yourself just because I'm here; you know you would delight to do it if I were n't."

Barker bent over the silken lap in which the child was comfortably nestling, and in that attitude had a faint consciousness that Mrs. Horncastle was mischievously breathing into his curls a silent laugh. Barker lifted his firstborn with proud skillfulness, but that sagacious infant evidently knew when he was comfortable, and in a paroxysm of objection caught his father's curls with one fist, while with the other he grasped Mrs.

Horncastle's brown braids and brought their heads into contact. Upon which humorous situation Norah, the nurse, entered.

"It's all right, Norah," said Mrs. Horncastle, laughing, as she disengaged herself from the linking child. "Mr. Barker has claimed the baby, and has agreed to forgive you and me and say nothing to Mrs. Barker." Norah, with the inscrutable criticism of her sex on her sex, thought it extremely probable, and halted with exasperating discretion. "There," continued Mrs. Horncastle, playfully evading the child's further advances, "go with papa, that's a dear. Mr. Barker prefers to carry him back, Norah."

"But," said the ingenuous and persistent Barker, still lingering in hopes of recalling the woman's previous expression, "you *do* love children, and you think him a bright little chap for his age?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Horncastle, putting back her loosened braid, "so round and fat and soft. And such a discriminating eye for jewelry. Really you ought to get a necklace like mine for Mrs. Barker — it would please both, you know." She moved

slowly away, the united efforts of Norah and Barker scarcely sufficing to restrain the struggling child from leaping after her as she turned at the door and blew him a kiss.

When Barker regained his room he found that Mrs. Barker had dismissed Stacy from her mind except so far as to invoke Norah's aid in laying out her smartest gown for dinner. "But why take all this trouble, dear?" said her simple-minded husband; "we are going to dine in a private room so that we can talk over old times all by ourselves, and any dress would suit him. And, Lord, dear!" he added, with a quick brightening at the fancy, "if you could only just rig yourself up in that pretty lilac gown you used to wear at Boomville—it would be too killing, and just like old times. I put it away myself in one of our trunks—I could n't bear to leave it behind; I know just where it is. I'll"—But Mrs. Barker's restraining scorn withheld him.

"George Barker, if you think I am going to let you throw away and utterly *waste* Mr. Stacy on us, alone, in a private room with closed doors—and I dare say you'd like to sit in your dressing-gown and slippers—you

are entirely mistaken. I know what is due, not to your old partner, but to the great Mr. Stacy, the financier, and I know what is due *from him to us!* No! We dine in the great dining-room, publicly, and, if possible, at the very next table to those stuck-up Peterburys and their Eastern friends, including that horrid woman, which, I'm sure, ought to satisfy you. Then you can talk as much as you like, and as loud as you like, about old times, — and the louder and the more the better, — but I don't think *he'll* like it."

"But the baby!" expostulated Barker. "Stacy's just wild to see him — and we can't bring him down to the table — though we *might*," he added, momentarily brightening.

"After dinner," said Mrs. Barker severely, "we will walk through the big drawing-rooms, and *then* Mr. Stacy may come upstairs and see him in his crib; but not before. And now, George, I do wish that to-night, *for once*, you would not wear a turn-down collar, and that you would go to the barber's and have him cut your hair and smooth out the curls. And, for Heaven's

sake! let him put some wax or gum or *something* on your mustache and twist it up on your cheek like Captain Heath's, for it positively droops over your mouth like a girl's ringlet. It's quite enough for me to hear people talk of your inexperience, but really I don't want you to look as if I had run away with a pretty schoolboy. And, considering the size of that child, it's positively disgraceful. And, one thing more, George. When I'm talking to anybody, please don't sit opposite to me, beaming with delight, and your mouth open. And don't roar if by chance I say something funny. And — whatever you do — don't make eyes at me in company whenever I happen to allude to you, as I did before Captain Heath. It is positively too ridiculous."

Nothing could exceed the laughing good humor with which her husband received these cautions, nor the evident sincerity with which he promised amendment. Equally sincere was he, though a little more thoughtful, in his severe self-examination of his deficiencies, when, later, he seated himself at the window with one hand softly encom-

passing his child's chubby fist in the crib beside him, and, in the instinctive fashion of all loneliness, looked out of the window. The southern trades were whipping the waves of the distant bay and harbor into yeasty crests. Sheets of rain swept the sidewalks with the regularity of a fusillade, against which a few pedestrians struggled with flapping waterproofs and slanting umbrellas. He could look along the deserted length of Montgomery Street to the heights of Telegraph Hill and its long-disused semaphore. It seemed lonelier to him than the mile-long sweep of Heavy Tree Hill, writhing against the mountain wind and its æolian song. He had never felt so lonely *there*. In his rigid self-examination he thought Kitty right in protesting against the effect of his youthfulness and optimism. Yet he was also right in being himself. There is an egoism in the highest simplicity; and Barker, while willing to believe in others' methods, never abandoned his own aims. He was right in loving Kitty as he did; he knew that she was better and more lovable than she could believe herself to be; but he was willing to believe it pained and

discomposed her if he showed it before company. He would not have her change even this peculiarity — it was part of herself — no more than he would have changed himself. And behind what he had conceived was her clear, practical common sense, all this time had been her belief that she had deceived her father! Poor dear, dear Kitty! And she had suffered because stupid people had conceived that her father had led him away in selfish speculations. As if he — Barker — would not have first discovered it, and as if anybody — even dear Kitty herself — was responsible for *his* convictions and actions but himself. Nevertheless, this gentle egotist was unusually serious, and when the child awoke at last, and with a fretful start and vacant eyes pushed his caressing hand away, he felt lonelier than before. It was with a slight sense of humiliation, too, that he saw it stretch its hands to the mere hireling, Norah, who had never given it the love that he had seen even in the frivolous Mrs. Horncastle's eyes. Later, when his wife came in, looking very pretty in her elaborate dinner toilette, he had the same conflicting emotions. He knew that

they had already passed that phase of their married life when she no longer dressed to please him, and that the dictates of fashion or the rivalry of another woman she held superior to his tastes ; yet he did not blame her. But he was a little surprised to see that her dress was copied from one of Mrs. Horncastle's most striking ones, and that it did not suit her. That which adorned the maturer woman did not agree with the demure and slightly austere prettiness of the young wife.

But Barker forgot all this when Stacy — reserved and somewhat severe-looking in evening dress — arrived with business punctuality. He fancied that his old partner received the announcement that they would dine in the public room with something of surprise, and he saw him glance keenly at Kitty in her fine array, as if he had suspected it was her choice, and understood her motives. Indeed, the young husband had found himself somewhat nervous in regard to Stacy's estimate of Kitty ; he was conscious that she was not looking and acting like the old Kitty that Stacy had known ; it did not enter his honest heart that Stacy

had, perhaps, not appreciated her then, and that her present quality might accord more with his worldly tastes and experience. It was, therefore, with a kind of timid delight that he saw Stacy apparently enter into her mood, and with a still more timorous amusement to notice that he seemed to sympathize not only with her, but with her half-rallying, half-serious attitude towards his (Barker's) inexperience and simplicity. He was glad that she had made a friend of Stacy, even in this way. Stacy would understand, as he did, her pretty willfulness at last ; she would understand what a true friend Stacy was to him. It was with unfeigned satisfaction that he followed them in to dinner as she leaned upon his guest's arm, chatting confidentially. He was only uneasy because her manner had a slight ostentation.

The entrance of the little party produced a quick sensation throughout the dining-room. Whispers passed from table to table ; all heads were turned towards the great financier as towards a magnet ; a few guests even shamelessly faced round in their chairs as he passed. Mrs. Barker was pink, pretty, and voluble with excitement ; Stacy had a

slight mask of reserve ; Barker was the only one natural and unconscious.

As the dinner progressed Barker found that there was little chance for him to invoke his old partner's memories of the past. He found, however, that Stacy had received a letter from Demorest, and that he was coming home from Europe. His letters were still sad ; they both agreed upon that. And then for the first time that day Stacy looked intently at Barker with the look that he had often worn on Heavy Tree Hill.

"Then you think it is the same old trouble that worries him?" said Barker in an awed and sympathetic voice.

"I believe it is," said Stacy, with an equal feeling. Mrs. Barker pricked up her pretty ears ; her husband's ready sympathy was familiar enough ; but that this cold, practical Stacy should be moved at anything piqued her curiosity.

"And you believe that he has never got over it?" continued Barker.

"He had one chance, but he threw it away," said Stacy energetically. "If, instead of going off to Europe by himself to brood over it, he had joined me in business, he 'd have been another man."

"But not Demorest," said Barker quickly.

"What dreadful secret is this about Demorest?" said Mrs. Barker petulantly. "Is he ill?"

Both men were silent by their old common instinct. But it was Stacy who said "No" in a way that put any further questioning at an end, and Barker was grateful and for the moment disloyal to his Kitty.

It was with delight that Mrs. Barker had seen that the attention of the next table was directed to them, and that even Mrs. Horncastle had glanced from time to time at Stacy. But she was not prepared for the evident equal effect that Mrs. Horncastle had created upon Stacy. His cold face warmed, his critical eye softened; he asked her name. Mrs. Barker was voluble, prejudiced, and, it seemed, misinformed.

"I know it all," said Stacy, with didactic emphasis. "Her husband was as bad as they make them. When her life had become intolerable *with him*, he tried to make it shameful *without him* by abandoning her. She could get a divorce a dozen times over, but she won't."

"I suppose that's what makes her so very

attractive to gentlemen," said Mrs. Barker ironically.

"I have never seen her before," continued Stacy, with business precision, "although I and two other men are guardians of her property, and have saved it from the clutches of her husband. They told me she was handsome — and so she is."

Pleased with the sudden human weakness of Stacy, Barker glanced at his wife for sympathy. But she was looking studiously another way, and the young husband's eyes, still full of his gratification, fell upon Mrs. Horncastle's. She looked away with a bright color. Whereupon the sanguine Barker — perfectly convinced that she returned Stacy's admiration — was seized with one of his old boyish dreams of the future, and saw Stacy happily united to her, and was only recalled to the dinner before him by its end. Then Stacy duly promenaded the great saloon with Mrs. Barker on his arm, visited the baby in her apartments, and took an easy leave. But he grasped Barker's hand before parting in quite his old fashion, and said, "Come to lunch with me at the bank any day, and we'll talk of Phil Demorest," and

left Barker as happy as if the appointment were to confer the favor he had that morning refused. But Mrs. Barker, who had overheard, was more dubious.

"You don't suppose he asks you to talk with you about Demorest and his stupid secret, do you?" she said scornfully.

"Perhaps not only about that," said Barker, glad that she had not demanded the secret.

"Well," returned Mrs. Barker as she turned away, "he might just as well lunch here and talk about *her* — and see her, too."

Meantime Stacy had dropped into his club, only a few squares distant. His appearance created the same interest that it had produced at the hotel, but with less reserve among his fellow members.

"Have you heard the news?" said a dozen voices. Stacy had not; he had been dining out.

"That infernal swindle of a Divide Railroad has passed the legislature."

Stacy instantly remembered Barker's absurd belief in it and his reasons. He smiled and said carelessly, "Are you quite sure it's a swindle?"

There was a dead silence at the coolness of the man who had been most outspoken against it.

"But," said a voice hesitatingly, "you know it goes nowhere and to no purpose."

"But that does not prevent it, now that it's a fact, from going anywhere and to some purpose," said Stacy, turning away. He passed into the reading-room quietly, but in an instant turned and quickly descended by another staircase into the hall, hurriedly put on his overcoat, and slipping out was a moment later reëntering the hotel. Here he hastily summoned Barker, who came down, flushed and excited. Laying his hand on Barker's arm in his old dominant way, he said:—

"Don't delay a single hour, but get a written agreement for that Ditch property."

Barker smiled. "But I have. Got it this afternoon."

"Then you know?" ejaculated Stacy in surprise.

"I only know," said Barker, coloring, "that you said I could back out of it if it was n't signed, and that's what Kitty said, too. And I thought it looked awfully mean

for me to hold a man to that kind of a bargain. And so — you won't be mad, old fellow, will you? — I thought I'd put it beyond any question of my own good faith by having it in black and white." He stopped, laughing and blushing, but still earnest and sincere. "You don't think me a fool, do you?" he said pathetically.

Stacy smiled grimly. "I think, Barker boy, that if you go to the Branch you'll have no difficulty in paying for the Ditch property. Good-night."

In a few moments he was back at the club again before any one knew he had even left the building. As he again reëntered the smoking-room he found the members still in eager discussion about the new railroad. One was saying, "If they could get an extension, and carry the road through Heavy Tree Hill to Boomville they'd be all right."

"I quite agree with you," said Stacy.

CHAPTER III.

THE swaying, creaking, Boomville coach had at last reached the level ridge, and sank forward upon its springs with a sigh of relief and the slow precipitation of the red dust which had hung in clouds around it. The whole coach, inside and out, was covered with this impalpable powder ; it had poured into the windows that gaped widely in the insufferable heat ; it lay thick upon the novel read by the passenger who had for the third or fourth time during the ascent made a gutter of the half-opened book and blown the dust away in a single puff, like the smoke from a pistol. It lay in folds and creases over the yellow silk duster of the handsome woman on the back seat, and when she endeavored to shake it off enveloped her in a reddish nimbus. It grimed the handkerchiefs of others, and left sanguinary streaks on their mopped foreheads. But as the coach had slowly climbed the

summit the sun was also sinking behind the Black Spur Range, and with its ultimate disappearance a delicious coolness spread itself like a wave across the ridge. The passengers drew a long breath, the reader closed his book, the lady lifted the edge of her veil and delicately wiped her forehead, over which a few damp tendrils of hair were clinging. Even a distinguished-looking man who had sat as impenetrable and remote as a statue in one of the front seats moved and turned his abstracted face to the window. His deeply tanned cheek and clearly cut features harmonized with the red dust that lay in the curves of his brown linen dust-cloak, and completed his resemblance to a bronze figure. Yet it was Demorest, changed only in coloring. Now, as five years ago, his abstraction had a certain quality which the most familiar stranger shrank from disturbing. But in the general relaxation of relief the novel-reader addressed him.

“ Well, we ain’t far from Boomville now, and it ’s all down-grade the rest of the way. I reckon you ’ll be as glad to get a ‘ wash up ’ and a ‘ shake ’ as the rest of us.”

“ I am afraid I won’t have so early an

opportunity," said Demorest, with a faint, grave smile, "for I get off at the cross-road to Heavy Tree Hill."

"Heavy Tree Hill!" repeated the other in surprise. "You ain't goin' to Heavy Tree Hill? Why, you might have gone there direct by railroad, and have been there four hours ago. You know there's a branch from the Divide Railroad goes there straight to the hotel at Hymettus."

"Where?" said Demorest, with a puzzled smile.

"Hymettus. That's the fancy name they've given to the watering-place on the slope. But I reckon you're a stranger here?"

"For five years," said Demorest. "I fancy I've heard of the railroad, although I prefer to go to Heavy Tree this way. But I never heard of a watering-place there before."

"Why, it's the biggest boom of the year. Folks that are tired of the fogs of 'Frisco and the heat of Sacramento all go there. It's four thousand feet up, with a hotel like Saratoga, dancing, and a band plays every night. And it all sprang out of the Di-

vide Railroad and a crank named George Barker, who bought up some old Ditch property and ran a branch line along its levels, and made a junction with the Divide. You can come all the way from 'Frisco or Sacramento by rail. It's a mighty big thing!"

"Yet," said Demorest, with some animation, "you call the man who originated this success a crank. I should say he was a genius."

The other passenger shook his head. "All sheer nigger luck. He bought the Ditch plant afore there was a ghost of a chance for the Divide Railroad, just out o' pure d—d foolishness. He expected so little from it that he had n't even got the agreement done in writin', and had n't paid for it, when the Divide Railroad passed the legislature, as it never oughter done! For, you see, the blamedest cur'ous thing about the whole affair was that this 'straw' road of a Divide, all pure wilcat, was only gotten up to frighten the Pacific Railroad sharps into buying it up. And the road that nobody ever calculated would ever have a rail of it laid was pushed on as soon

as folks knew that the Ditch plant had been bought up, for they thought there was a big thing behind it. Even the hotel was, at first, simply a kind of genteel almshouse that this yer Barker had built for broken-down miners ! ”

“ Nevertheless, ” continued Demorest, smiling, “ you admit that it is a great success ? ”

“ Yes, ” said the other, a little irritated by some complacency in Demorest’s smile, “ but the success is n’t *his’n*. Fools has ideas, and wise men profit by them, for that hotel now has Jim Stacy’s bank behind it, and is even a kind of country branch of the Brook House in ’Frisco. Barker’s out of it, I reckon. Anyhow, *he* could n’t run a hotel, for all that his wife — she that’s one of the big ’Frisco swells now — used to help serve in her father’s. No, sir, it’s just a fool’s luck, gettin’ the first taste and leavin’ the rest to others. ”

“ I’m not sure that it’s the worst kind of luck, ” returned Demorest, with persistent gravity ; “ and I suppose he’s satisfied with it. ” But so heterodox an opinion only irritated his antagonist the more, especially as he noticed that the handsome woman in

the back seat appeared to be interested in the conversation, and even sympathetic with Demorest. The man was in the main a good-natured fellow and loyal to his friends; but this did not preclude any virulent criticism of others, and for a moment he hated this bronze-faced stranger, and even saw blemishes in the handsome woman's beauty. "That may be *your* idea of an Eastern man," he said bluntly, "but I kin tell ye that Californy ain't run on those lines. No, sir." Nevertheless, his curiosity got the better of his ill humor, and as the coach at last pulled up at the cross-road for Demorest to descend he smiled affably at his departing companion.

"You allowed just now that you'd bin five years away. Whar mout ye have bin?"

"In Europe," said Demorest pleasantly.

"I reckoned ez much," returned his interrogator, smiling significantly at the other passengers. "But in what place?"

"Oh, many," said Demorest, smiling also.

"But what place war ye last livin' at?"

"Well," said Demorest, descending the steps, but lingering for a moment with his hand on the door of the coach, "oddly

enough, now you remind me of it — at Hy-mettus!”

He closed the door, and the coach rolled on. The passenger reddened, glanced indignantly after the departing figure of Demorest and suspiciously at the others. The lady was looking from the window with a faint smile on her face.

“He might hev given me a civil answer,” muttered the passenger, and resumed his novel.

When the coach drew up before Carter’s Hotel the lady got down, and the curiosity of her susceptible companions was gratified to the extent of learning from the register that her name was Horncastle.

She was shown to a private sitting-room, which chanced to be the one which had belonged to Mrs. Barker in the days of her maidenhood, and was the sacred, impenetrable bower to which she retired when her daily duties of waiting upon her father’s guests were over. But the breath of custom had passed through it since then, and but little remained of its former maiden glories, except a few schoolgirl crayon drawings on the wall and an unrecognizable portrait of

herself in oil, done by a wandering artist and still preserved as a receipt for his unpaid bill. Of these facts Mrs. Horncastle knew nothing; she was evidently preoccupied, and after she had removed her outer duster and entered the room, she glanced at the clock on the mantel-shelf and threw herself with an air of resigned abstraction in an armchair in the corner. Her traveling-dress, although unostentatious, was tasteful and well-fitting; a slight pallor from her fatiguing journey, and, perhaps, from some absorbing thought, made her beauty still more striking. She gave even an air of elegance to the faded, worn adornments of the room, which it is to be feared it never possessed in Miss Kitty's occupancy. Again she glanced at the clock. There was a tap at the door.

"Come in."

The door opened to a Chinese servant bearing a piece of torn paper with a name written on it in lieu of a card.

Mrs. Horncastle took it, glanced at the name, and handed the paper back.

"There must be some mistake," she said.

"I do not know Mr. Steptoe."

“No, but you know *me* all the same,” said a voice from the doorway as a man entered, coolly took the Chinese servant by the elbows and thrust him into the passage, closing the door upon him. “Steptoe and Horncastle are the same man, only I prefer to call myself Steptoe *here*. And I see *you*’re down on the register as ‘Horncastle.’ Well, it’s plucky of you, and it’s not a bad name to keep; you might be thankful that I have always left it to you. And if I call myself Steptoe here it’s a good blind against any of your swell friends knowing you met your *husband* here.”

In the half-scornful, half-resigned look she had given him when he entered there was no doubt that she recognized him as the man she had come to see. He had changed little in the five years that had elapsed since he entered the three partners’ cabin at Heavy Tree Hill. His short hair and beard still clung to his head like curled moss or the crisp flocculence of Astrakhan. He was dressed more pretentiously, but still gave the same idea of vulgar strength. She listened to him without emotion, but said, with even a deepening of scorn in her manner:—

“What new shame is this?”

“Nothing *new*,” he replied. “Only five years ago I was livin’ over on the Bar at Heavy Tree Hill under the name of Steptoe, and folks here might recognize me. I was here when your particular friend, Jim Stacy, who only knew me as Steptoe, and does n’t know me as Horncastle, your *husband*,—for all he’s bound up my property for you,—made his big strike with his two partners. I was in his cabin that very night, and drank his whiskey. Oh, I’m all right there! I left everything all right behind me—only it’s just as well he does n’t know I’m Horncastle. And as the boy happened to be there with me” — He stopped, and looked at her significantly.

The expression of her face changed. Eagerness, anxiety, and even fear came into it in turn, but always mingling with some scorn that dominated her. “The boy!” she said in a voice that had changed too; “well, what about him? You promised to tell me all, — all!”

“Where’s the money?” he said. “Husband and wife are *one*, I know,” he went on with a coarse laugh, “but I don’t trust *myself* in these matters.”

She took from a traveling-reticule that lay beside her a roll of notes and a chamois leather bag of coin, and laid them on the table before him. He examined both carefully.

"All right," he said. "I see you've got the checks made out 'to bearer.' Your head's level, Conny. Pity you and me can't agree."

"I went to the bank across the way as soon as I arrived," she said, with contemptuous directness. "I told them I was going over to Hymettus and might want money."

He dropped into a chair before her with his broad heavy hands upon his knees, and looked at her with an equal, though baser, contempt: for his was mingled with a certain pride of mastery and possession.

"And, of course, you'll go to Hymettus and cut a splurge as you always do. The beautiful Mrs. Horncastle! The helpless victim of a wretched, dissipated, disgraced, gambling husband. So dreadfully sad, you know, and so interesting! Could get a divorce from the brute if she wanted, but won't, on account of her religious scruples. And so while the brute is gambling, swin-

dling, disgracing himself, and dodging a shot here and a lynch committee there, two or three hundred miles away, you 're splurging round in first-class hotels and watering-places, doing the injured and abused, and run after by a lot of men who are ready to take my place, and, maybe, some of my reputation along with it."

"Stop!" she said suddenly, in a voice that made the glass chandelier ring. He had risen too, with a quick, uneasy glance towards the door. But her outbreak passed as suddenly, and sinking back into her chair, she said, with her previous scornful resignation, "Never mind. Go on. You *know* you 're lying!"

He sat down again and looked at her critically. "Yes, as far as you 're concerned I *was* lying! I know your style. But as you know, too, that I 'd kill you and the first man I suspected, and there ain't a judge or a jury in all Californy that would n't let me go free for it, and even consider, too, that it had wiped off the whole slate agin me — it 's to my credit!"

"I know what you men call chivalry," she said coldly, "but I did not come here to

buy a knowledge of that. So now about the child?" she ended abruptly, leaning forward again with the same look of eager solicitude in her eyes.

"Well, about the child — our child — though, perhaps, I prefer to say *my* child," he began, with a certain brutal frankness. "I'll tell you. But first, I don't want you to talk about *buying* your information of me. If I have n't told you anything before, it's because I did n't think you oughter know. If I did n't trust the child to *you*, it's because I did n't think you could go shashaying about with a child that was three years old when I" — he stopped and wiped his mouth with the back of his hand — "made an honest woman of you — I think that's what they call it."

"But," she said eagerly, ignoring the insult, "I could have hidden it where no one but myself would have known it. I could have sent it to school and visited it as a relation."

"Yes," he said curtly, "like all women, and then blurted it out some day and made it worse."

"But," she said desperately, "even *then*,

suppose I had been willing to take the shame of it! I have taken more!"

"But I did n't intend that you should," he said roughly.

"You are very careful of my reputation," she returned scornfully.

"Not by a d—d sight," he burst out; "but I care for *his*! I'm not goin' to let any man call him a bastard!"

Callous as she had become even under this last cruel blow, she could not but see something in his coarse eyes she had never seen before; could not but hear something in his brutal voice she had never heard before! Was it possible that somewhere in the depths of his sordid nature he had his own contemptible sense of honor? A hysterical feeling came over her hitherto passive disgust and scorn, but it disappeared with his next sentence in a haze of anxiety. "No!" he said hoarsely, "he had enough wrong done him already."

"What do you mean?" she said imploringly. "Or are you again lying? You said, four years ago, that he had 'got into trouble;' that was your excuse for keeping him from me. Or was that a lie, too?"

His manner changed and softened, but not for any pity for his companion, but rather from some change in his own feelings. "Oh, *that*," he said, with a rough laugh, "that was only a kind o' trouble any sassy kid like him was likely to get into. You ain't got no call to hear that, for," he added, with a momentary return to his previous manner, "the wrong that was done him is *my* lookout! You want to know what I did with him, how he's been looked arter, and where he is? You want the worth of your money. That's square enough. But first I want you to know, though you may n't believe it, that every red cent you've given me to-night goes to *him*. And don't you forget it."

For all his vulgar frankness she knew he had lied to her many times before, — maliciously, wantonly, complacently, but never evasively; yet there was again that something in his manner which told her he was now telling the truth.

"Well," he began, settling himself back in his chair, "I told you I brought him to Heavy Tree Hill. After I left you I was n't going to trust him to no school; he knew

enough for me ; but when I left those parts where nobody knew you, and got a little nearer 'Frisco, where people might have known us both, I thought it better not to travel round with a kid o' that size as his *father*. So I got a young fellow here to pass him off as *his* little brother, and look after him and board him ; and I paid him a big price for it, too, you bet ! You would n't think it was a man who's now swelling around here, the top o' the pile, that ever took money from a brute like me, and for such schoolmaster work, too ; but he did, and his name was Van Loo, a clerk of the Ditch Company."

"Van Loo !" said the woman, with a movement of disgust ; " *that* man ! "

"What's the matter with Van Loo ? " he said, with a coarse laugh, enjoying his wife's discomfiture. "He speaks French and Spanish, and you oughter hear the kid roll off the lingo he's got from him. He's got style, and knows how to dress, and you ought to see the kid bow and scrape, and how he carries himself. Now, Van Loo was n't exactly my style, and I reckon I don't hanker after him much, but he served my purpose."

“ And this man knows ” — she said, with a shudder.

“ He knows Steptoe and the boy, but he don't know Horncastle nor *you*. Don't you be skeert. He 's the last man in the world who would hanker to see me or the kid again, or would dare to say that he ever had! Lord! I 'd like to see his fastidious mug if me and Eddy walked in upon him and his high-toned mother and sister some arternoon.” He threw himself back and laughed a derisive, spasmodic, choking laugh, which was so far from being genial that it even seemed to indicate a lively appreciation of pain in others rather than of pleasure in himself. He had often laughed 'at her in the same way.

“ And where is he now ? ” she said, with a compressed lip.

“ At school. Where, I don't tell you. You know why. But he 's looked after by me, and d—d well looked after, too.”

She hesitated, composed her face with an effort, parted her lips, and looked out of the window into the gathering darkness. Then after a moment she said slowly, yet with a certain precision : —

“ And his mother ? Do you ever talk to him of *her* ? Does — does he ever speak of *me* ? ”

“ What do you think ? ” he said comfortably, changing his position in the chair, and trying to read her face in the shadow. “ Come, now. You don’t know, eh ? Well — no ! *No* ! You understand. No ! He’s *my* friend — *mine* ! He’s stood by me through thick and thin. Run at my heels when everybody else fled me. Dodged vigilance committees with me, laid out in the brush with me with his hand in mine when the sheriff’s deputies were huntin’ me ; shut his jaw close when, if he squealed, he’d have been called another victim of the brute Horncastle, and been as petted and canoodled as you.”

It would have been difficult for any one but the woman who knew the man before her to have separated his brutish delight in paining her from another feeling she had never dreamt him capable of, — an intense and fierce pride in his affection for his child. And it was the more hopeless to her that it was not the mere sentiment of reciprocation, but the material instinct of paternity in its

most animal form. And it seemed horrible to her that the only outcome of what had been her own wild, youthful passion for this brute was this love for the flesh of her flesh, for she was more and more conscious as he spoke that her yearning for the boy was the yearning of an equally dumb and unreasoning maternity. They had met again as animals — in fear, contempt, and anger of each other; but the animal had triumphed in both.

When she spoke again it was as the woman of the world, — the woman who had laughed two years ago at the irrepressible Barker. "It's a new thing," she said, languidly turning her rings on her fingers, "to see you in the rôle of a doting father. And may I ask how long you have had this amiable weakness, and how long it is to last?"

To her surprise and the keen retaliating delight of her sex, a conscious flush covered his face to the crisp edges of his black and matted beard. For a moment she hoped that he had lied. But, to her greater surprise, he stammered in equal frankness: "It's growed upon me for the last five years

—ever since I was alone with him.” He stopped, cleared his throat, and then, standing up before her, said in his former voice, but with a more settled and intense deliberation: “You wanter know how long it will last, do ye? Well, you know your special friend, Jim Stacy — the big millionaire — the great Jim of the Stock Exchange — the man that pinches the money market of Californy’ between his finger and thumb and makes it squeal in New York — the man who shakes the stock market when he sneezes? Well, it will go on until that man is a beggar; until he has to borrow a dime for his breakfast, and slump out of his lunch with a cent’s worth of rat poison or a bullet in his head! It’ll go on until his old partner — that softy George Barker — comes to the bottom of his d—d fool luck and is a penny-a-liner for the papers and a hanger-round at free lunches, and his scatter-brained wife runs away with another man! It’ll go on until the high-toned Demorest, the last of those three little tin gods of Heavy Tree Hill, will have to climb down, and will know what *I* feel and what he’s made *me* feel, and will wish himself in hell before he ever

made the big strike on Heavy Tree! That's me! You hear me! I'm shoutin'! It'll last till then! It may be next week, next month, next year. But it'll come. And when it does come you'll see me and Eddy just waltzin' in and takin' the chief seats in the synagogue! And you'll have a free pass to the show!"

Either he was too intoxicated with his vengeful vision, or the shadows of the room had deepened, but he did not see the quick flush that had risen to his wife's face with this allusion to Barker, nor the after-settling of her handsome features into a dogged determination equal to his own. His blind fury against the three partners did not touch her curiosity; she was only struck with the evident depth of his emotion. He had never been a braggart; his hostility had always been lazy and cynical. Remembering this, she had a faint stirring of respect for the undoubted courage and consciousness of strength shown in this wild but single-handed crusade against wealth and power; rather, perhaps, it seemed to her to condone her own weakness in her youthful and inexplicable passion for him. No wonder she had submitted.

"Then you have nothing more to tell me?" she said after a pause, rising and going towards the mantel.

"You need n't light up for me," he returned, rising also. "I am going. Unless," he added, with his coarse laugh, "you think it would n't look well for Mrs. Horncastle to have been sitting in the dark with — a stranger!" He paused as she contemptuously put down the candlestick and threw the unlit match into the grate. "No, I've nothing more to tell. He's a fancy-looking pup. You'd take him for twenty-one, though he's only sixteen — clean-limbed and perfect — but for one thing" — He stopped. He met her quick look of interrogation, however, with a lowering silence that, nevertheless, changed again as he surveyed her erect figure by the faint light of the window with a sardonic smile. "He favors you, I think, and in all but one thing, too."

"And that?" she queried coldly, as he seemed to hesitate.

"He ain't ashamed of *me*," he returned, with a laugh.

The door closed behind him; she heard

his heavy step descend the creaking stairs; he was gone. She went to the window and threw it open, as if to get rid of the atmosphere charged with his presence, — a presence still so potent that she now knew that for the last five minutes she had been, to her horror, struggling against its magnetism. She even recoiled now at the thought of her child, as if, in these new confidences over it, it had revived the old intimacy in this link of their common flesh. She looked down from her window on the square shoulders, thick throat, and crisp matted hair of her husband as he vanished in the darkness, and drew a breath of freedom, — a freedom not so much from him as from her own weakness that he was bearing away with him into the exonerating night.

She shut the window and sank down in her chair again, but in the encompassing and compassionate obscurity of the room. And this was the man she had loved and for whom she had wrecked her young life! Or *was* it love? and, if *not*, how was she better than he? Worse; for he was more loyal to that passion that had brought them together and its responsibilities than she was.

She had suffered the perils and pangs of maternity, and yet had only the mere animal yearning for her offspring, while he had taken over the toil and duty, and even the devotion, of parentage himself. But then she remembered also how he had fascinated her — a simple schoolgirl — by his sheer domineering strength, and how the objections of her parents to this coarse and common man had forced her into a clandestine intimacy that ended in her complete subjection to him. She remembered the birth of an infant whose concealment from her parents and friends was compassed by his low cunning; she remembered the late atonement of marriage preferred by the man she had already begun to loathe and fear, and who she now believed was eager only for her inheritance. She remembered her abject compliance through the greater fear of the world, the stormy scenes that followed their ill-omened union, her final abandonment of her husband, and the efforts of her friends and family who had rescued the last of her property from him. She was glad she remembered it; she dwelt upon it, upon his cruelty, his coarseness and vulgarity,

until she saw, as she honestly believed, the hidden springs of his affection for their child. It was *his* child in nature, however it might have favored her in looks; it was *his* own brutal *self* he was worshiping in his brutal progeny. How else could it have ignored *her* — its own mother? She never doubted the truth of what he had told her — she had seen it in his own triumphant eyes. And yet she would have made a kind mother; she remembered with a smile and a slight rising of color the affection of Barker's baby for her; she remembered with a deepening of that color the thrill of satisfaction she had felt in her husband's fulmination against Mrs. Barker, and, more than all, she felt in his blind and foolish hatred of Barker himself a delicious condonation of the strange feeling that had sprung up in her heart for Barker's simple, straightforward nature. How could *he* understand, how could *they* understand (by the plural she meant Mrs. Barker and Horncastle), a character so innately noble. In her strange attraction towards him she had felt a charming sense of what she believed was a superior and even matronly protection; in the

utter isolation of her life now — and with her husband's foolish abuse of him ringing in her ears — it seemed a sacred duty. She had lost a son. Providence had sent her an ideal friend to replace him. And this was quite consistent, too, with a faint smile that began to play about her mouth as she recalled some instances of Barker's delightful and irresistible youthfulness.

There was a clatter of hoofs and the sound of many voices from the street. Mrs. Horncastle knew it was the down coach changing horses; it would be off again in a few moments, and, no doubt, bearing her husband away with it. A new feeling of relief came over her as she at last heard the warning "All aboard!" and the great vehicle clattered and rolled into the darkness, trailing its burning lights across her walls and ceiling. But now she heard steps on the staircase, a pause before her room, a whisper of voices, the opening of the door, the rustle of a skirt, and a little feminine cry of protest as a man apparently tried to follow the figure into the room. "No, no! I tell you *no!*" remonstrated the woman's voice in a hurried whisper. "It won't do.

Everybody knows me here. You must not come in now. You must wait to be announced by the servant. Hush! Go!"

There was a slight struggle, the sound of a kiss, and the woman succeeded in finally shutting the door. Then she walked slowly, but with a certain familiarity towards the mantel, struck a match and lit the candle. The light shone upon the bright eyes and slightly flushed face of Mrs. Barker. But the motionless woman in the chair had recognized her voice and the voice of her companion at once. And then their eyes met.

Mrs. Barker drew back, but did not utter a cry. Mrs. Horncastle, with eyes even brighter than her companion's, smiled. The red deepened in Mrs. Barker's cheek.

"This is my room!" she said indignantly, with a sweeping gesture around the walls.

"I should judge so," said Mrs. Horncastle, following the gesture; "but," she added quietly, "they put *me* into it. It appears, however, they did not expect you."

Mrs. Barker saw her mistake. "No, no," she said apologetically, "of course not." Then she added, with nervous volubility, sitting down and tugging at her gloves,

“You see, I just ran down from Marysville to take a look at my father’s old house on my way to Hymettus. I hope I have n’t disturbed you. Perhaps,” she said, with sudden eagerness, “you were asleep when I came in!”

“No,” said Mrs. Horncastle, “I was not sleeping nor dreaming. I heard you come in.”

“Some of these men are such idiots,” said Mrs. Barker, with a half-hysterical laugh. “They seem to think if a woman accepts the least courtesy from them they’ve a right to be familiar. But I fancy that fellow was a little astonished when I shut the door in his face.”

“I fancy he *was*,” returned Mrs. Horncastle dryly. “But I should n’t call Mr. Van Loo an idiot. He has the reputation of being a cautious business man.”

Mrs. Barker bit her lip. Her companion had been recognized. She rose with a slight flirt of her skirt. “I suppose I must go and get a room; there was nobody in the office when I came. Everything is badly managed here since my father took away the best servants to Hymettus.” She moved

with affected carelessness towards the door, when Mrs. Horncastle, without rising from her seat, said: —

“Why not stay here?”

Mrs. Barker brightened for a moment. “Oh,” she said, with polite deprecation, “I could n’t think of turning you out.”

“I don’t intend you shall,” said Mrs. Horncastle. “We will stay here together until you go with me to Hymettus, or until Mr. Van Loo leaves the hotel. He will hardly attempt to come in here again if I remain.”

Mrs. Barker, with a half-laugh, sat down irresolutely. Mrs. Horncastle gazed at her curiously; she was evidently a novice in this sort of thing. But, strange to say, — and I leave the ethics of this for the sex to settle, — the fact did not soften Mrs. Horncastle’s heart, nor in the least qualify her attitude towards the younger woman. After an awkward pause Mrs. Barker rose again. “Well, it’s very good of you, and — and — I’ll just run out and wash my hands and get the dust off me, and come back.”

“No, Mrs. Barker,” said Mrs. Horncastle, rising and approaching her, “you will first

wash your hands of this Mr. Van Loo, and get some of the dust of the rendezvous off you before you do anything else. You *can* do it by simply telling him, *should you meet him in the hall*, that I was sitting here when he came in, and heard *everything!* Depend upon it, he won't trouble you again."

But Mrs. Barker, though inexperienced in love, was a good fighter. The best of the sex are. She dropped into the rocking-chair, and began rocking backwards and forwards while still tugging at her gloves, and said, in a gradually warming voice, "I certainly shall not magnify Mr. Van Loo's silliness to that importance. And I have yet to learn what you mean by talking about a rendezvous! And I want to know," she continued, suddenly stopping her rocking and tilting the rockers impertinently behind her, as, with her elbows squared on the chair arms, she tilted her own face defiantly up into Mrs. Horncastle's, "how a woman in your position — who does n't live with her husband — dares to talk to *me!*"

There was a lull before the storm. Mrs. Horncastle approached nearer, and, laying her hand on the back of the chair, leaned

over her, and, with a white face and a metallic ring in her voice, said: "It is just because I am a woman *in my position* that I do! It is because I don't live with my husband that I can tell you what it will be when you no longer live with yours — which will be the inevitable result of what you are now doing. It is because I *was* in this position that the very man who is pursuing you, because he thinks you are discontented with *your* husband, once thought he could pursue me because I had left *mine*. You are here with him alone, without the knowledge of your husband; call it folly, caprice, vanity, or what you like, it can have but one end — to put you in my place at last, to be considered the fair game afterwards for any man who may succeed him. You can test him and the truth of what I say by telling him now that I heard all."

"Suppose he does n't care what you have heard," said Mrs. Barker sharply. "Suppose he says nobody would believe you, if 'telling' is your game. Suppose he is a friend of my husband and he thinks him a much better guardian of my reputation than a woman like you. Suppose he should be

the first one to tell my husband of the foul slander invented by you!"

For an instant Mrs. Horncastle was taken aback by the audacity of the woman before her. She knew the simple confidence and boyish trust of Barker in his wife in spite of their sometimes strained relations, and she knew how difficult it would be to shake it. And she had no idea of betraying Mrs. Barker's secret to him, though she had made this scene in his interest. She had wished to save Mrs. Barker from a compromising situation, even if there was a certain vindictiveness in her exposing her to herself. Yet she knew it was quite possible now, if Mrs. Barker had immediate access to her husband, that she would convince him of her perfect innocence. Nevertheless, she had still great confidence in Van Loo's fear of scandal and his utter unmanliness. She knew he was not in love with Mrs. Barker, and this puzzled her when she considered the evident risk he was running now. Her face, however, betrayed nothing. She drew back from Mrs. Barker, and, with an indifferent and graceful gesture towards the door, said, as she leaned against the mantel,

“Go, then, and see this much-abused gentleman, and then go together with him and make peace with your husband — even on those terms. If I have saved you from the consequences of your folly I shall be willing to bear even *his* blame.”

“Whatever I do,” said Mrs. Barker, rising hotly, “I shall not stay here any longer to be insulted.” She flounced out of the room and swept down the staircase into the office. Here she found an overworked clerk, and with crimson cheeks and flashing eyes wanted to know why in her own father’s hotel she had found her own sitting-room engaged, and had been obliged to wait half an hour before she could be shown into a decent apartment to remove her hat and cloak in ; and how it was that even the gentleman who had kindly escorted her had evidently been unable to procure her any assistance. She said this in a somewhat high voice, which might have reached the ears of that gentleman had he been in the vicinity. But he was not, and she was forced to meet the somewhat dazed apologies of the clerk alone, and to accompany the chambermaid to a room only a few paces

distant from the one she had quitted. Here she hastily removed her outer duster and hat, washed her hands, and consulted her excited face in the mirror, with the door ajar and an ear sensitively attuned to any step in the corridor. But all this was effected so rapidly that she was at last obliged to sit down in a chair near the half-opened door, and wait. She waited five minutes — ten — but still no footstep. Then she went out into the corridor and listened, and then, smoothing her face, she slipped downstairs, past the door of that hateful room, and reappeared before the clerk with a smiling but somewhat pale and languid face. She had found the room very comfortable, but it was doubtful whether she would stay over night or go on to Hymettus. Had anybody been inquiring for her? She expected to meet friends. No! And her escort — the gentleman who came with her — was possibly in the billiard-room or the bar?

“Oh no! He was gone,” said the clerk.

“Gone!” echoed Mrs. Barker. “Impossible! He was — he was here only a moment ago.”

The clerk rang a bell sharply. The stableman appeared.

“That tall, smooth-faced man, in a high hat, who came with the lady,” said the clerk severely and concisely, — “did n’t you tell me he was gone?”

“Yes, sir,” said the stableman.

“Are you sure?” interrupted Mrs. Barker, with a dazzling smile that, however, masked a sudden tightening round her heart.

“Quite sure, miss,” said the stableman, “for he was in the yard when Steptoe came, after missing the coach. He wanted a buggy to take him over to the Divide. We had n’t one, so he went over to the other stables, and he did n’t come back, so I reckon he’s gone. I remember it, because Steptoe came by a minute after he’d gone, in another buggy, and as he was going to the Divide, too, I wondered why the gentleman had n’t gone with him.”

“And he left no message for me? He said nothing?” asked Mrs. Barker, quite breathless, but still smiling.

“He said nothin’ to me but ‘Is n’t that Steptoe over there?’ when Steptoe came in. And I remember he said it kinder sudden — as if he was reminded o’ suthin’ he’d forgot; and then he asked for a buggy. Ye

see, miss," added the man, with a certain rough consideration for her disappointment, "that 's mebbe why he clean forgot to leave a message."

Mrs. Barker turned away, and ascended the stairs. Selfishness is quick to recognize selfishness, and she saw in a flash the reason of Van Loo's abandonment of her. Some fear of discovery had alarmed him; perhaps Steptoe knew her husband; perhaps he had heard of Mrs. Horncastle's possession of the sitting-room; perhaps — for she had not seen him since their playful struggle at the door — he had recognized the woman who was there, and the selfish coward had run away. Yes; Mrs. Horncastle was right: she had been only a miserable dupe.

Her cheeks blazed as she entered the room she had just quitted, and threw herself in a chair by the window. She bit her lip as she remembered how for the last three months she had been slowly yielding to Van Loo's cautious but insinuating solicitation, from a flirtation in the San Francisco hotel to a clandestine meeting in the street; from a ride in the suburbs to a supper in a fast restaurant after the theatre. Other women

did it who were fashionable and rich, as Van Loo had pointed out to her. Other fashionable women also gambled in stocks, and had their private broker in a "Charley" or a "Jack." Why should not Mrs. Barker have business with a "Paul" Van Loo, particularly as this fast craze permitted secret meetings?—for business of this kind could not be conducted in public, and permitted the fair gambler to call at private offices without fear and without reproach. Mrs. Barker's vanity, Mrs. Barker's love of ceremony and form, Mrs. Barker's snobbishness, were flattered by the attentions of this polished gentleman with a foreign name, which even had the flavor of nobility, who never picked up her fan and handed it to her without bowing, and always rose when she entered the room. Mrs. Barker's scant schoolgirl knowledge was touched by this gentleman, who spoke French fluently, and delicately explained to her the libretto of a risky opéra bouffe. And now she had finally yielded to a meeting out of San Francisco—and an ostensible visit—still as a speculator—to one or two mining districts—with *her broker*. This was the boldest of

her steps — an original idea of the fashionable Van Loo — which, no doubt, in time would become a craze, too. But it was a long step — and there was a streak of rustic decorum in Mrs. Barker's nature — the instinct that made Kitty Carter keep a perfectly secluded and distinct sitting-room in the days when she served her father's guests — that now had impelled her to make it a proviso that the first step of her journey should be from her old home in her father's hotel. It was this instinct of the proprieties that had revived in her suddenly at the door of the old sitting-room.

Then a new phase of the situation flashed upon her. It was hard for her vanity to accept Van Loo's desertion as voluntary and final. What if that hateful woman had lured him away by some trick or artfully designed message? She was capable of such meanness to insure the fulfillment of her prophecy. Or, more dreadful thought, what if she had some hold on his affections — she had said that he had pursued her; or, more infamous still, there were some secret understanding between them, and that she — Mrs. Barker — was the dupe of them both!

What was she doing in the hotel at such a moment? What was her story of going to Hymettus but a lie as transparent as her own? The tortures of jealousy, which is as often the incentive as it is the result of passion, began to rack her. She had probably yet known no real passion for this man; but with the thought of his abandoning her, and the conception of his faithlessness, came the wish to hold and keep him that was dangerously near it. What if he were even then in that room, the room where she had said she would not stay to be insulted, and they, thus secured against her intrusion, were laughing at her now? She half rose at the thought, but a sound of a horse's hoofs in the stable-yard arrested her. She ran to the window which gave upon it, and, crouching down beside it, listened eagerly. The clatter of hoofs ceased; the stableman was talking to some one; suddenly she heard the stableman say, "Mrs. Barker is here." Her heart leaped, — Van Loo had returned.

But here the voice of the other man which she had not yet heard arose for the first time clear and distinct. "Are you quite sure? I did n't know she left San Francisco."

The room reeled around her. The voice was George Barker's, her husband! "Very well," he continued. "You need n't put up my horse for the night. I may take her back a little later in the buggy."

In another moment she had swept down the passage, and burst into the other room. Mrs. Horncastle was sitting by the table with a book in her hand. She started as the half-maddened woman closed the door, locked it behind her, and cast herself on her knees at her feet.

"My husband is here," she gasped. "What shall I do? In Heaven's name help me!"

"Is Van Loo still here?" said Mrs. Horncastle quickly.

"No; gone. He went when I came."

Mrs. Horncastle caught her hand and looked intently into her frightened face. "Then what have you to fear from your husband?" she said abruptly.

"You don't understand. He did n't know I was here. He thought me in San Francisco."

"Does he know it now?"

"Yes. I heard the stableman tell him."

Could n't you say I came here with you; that we were here together; that it was just a little freak of ours? Oh, do!"

Mrs. Horncastle thought a moment. "Yes," she said, "we'll see him here together."

"Oh no! no!" said Mrs. Barker suddenly, clinging to her dress and looking fearfully towards the door. "I could n't, *could* n't see him now. Say I'm sick, tired out, gone to my room."

"But you'll have to see him later," said Mrs. Horncastle wonderingly.

"Yes, but he may go first. I heard him tell them not to put up his horse."

"Good!" said Mrs. Horncastle suddenly. "Go to your room and lock the door, and I'll come to you later. Stop! Would Mr. Barker be likely to disturb you if I told him you would like to be alone?"

"No, he never does. I often tell him that."

Mrs. Horncastle smiled faintly. "Come, quick, then," she said, "for he may come *here* first."

Opening the door she passed into the half dark and empty hall. "Now run!" She

heard the quick rustle of Mrs. Barker's skirt die away in the distance, the opening and shutting of a door — silence — and then turned back into her own room.

She was none too soon. Presently she heard Barker's voice saying, "Thank you, I can find the way," his still buoyant step on the staircase, and then saw his brown curls rising above the railing. The light streaming through the open door of the sitting-room into the half-lit hall had partially dazzled him, and, already bewildered, he was still more dazzled at the unexpected apparition of the smiling face and bright eyes of Mrs. Horncastle standing in the doorway.

"You have fairly caught us," she said, with charming composure; "but I had half a mind to let you wander round the hotel a little longer. Come in." Barker followed her in mechanically, and she closed the door. "Now, sit down," she said gayly, "and tell me how you knew we were here, and what you mean by surprising us at this hour."

Barker's ready color always rose on meeting Mrs. Horncastle, for whom he entertained a respectful admiration, not without

some fear of her worldly superiority. He flushed, bowed, and stared somewhat blankly around the room, at the familiar walls, at the chair from which Mrs. Horncastle had just risen, and finally at his wife's glove, which Mrs. Horncastle had a moment before ostentatiously thrown on the table. Seeing which she pounced upon it with assumed archness, and pretended to conceal it.

"I had no idea my wife was here," he said at last, "and I was quite surprised when the man told me, for she had not written to me about it." As his face was brightening, she for the first time noticed that his frank gray eyes had an abstracted look, and there was a faint line of contraction on his youthful forehead. "Still less," he added, "did I look for the pleasure of meeting you. For I only came here to inquire about my old partner, Demorest, who arrived from Europe a few days ago, and who should have reached Hymettus early this afternoon. But now I hear he came all the way by coach instead of by rail, and got off at the cross-road, and we must have passed each other on the different trails. So my journey would have gone for nothing, only that I

now shall have the pleasure of going back with you and Kitty. It will be a lovely drive by moonlight."

Relieved by this revelation, it was easy work for Mrs. Horncastle to launch out into a playful, tantalizing, witty — but, I grieve to say, entirely imaginative — account of her escapade with Mrs. Barker. How, left alone at the San Francisco hotel while their gentlemen friends were enjoying themselves at Hymettus, they resolved upon a little trip, partly for the purpose of looking into some small investments of their own, and partly for the fun of the thing. What funny experiences they had! How, in particular, one horrid inquisitive, vulgar wretch had been boring a European fellow passenger who was going to Hymettus, finally asking him where he had come from last, and when he answered "Hymettus," thought the man was insulting him —

"But," interrupted the laughing Barker, "that passenger may have been Demorest, who has just come from Greece, and surely Kitty would have recognized him."

Mrs. Horncastle instantly saw her blunder, and not only retrieved it, but turned it

to account. Ah, yes! but by that time poor Kitty, unused to long journeys and the heat, was utterly fagged out, was asleep, and perfectly unrecognizable in veils and dusters on the back seat of the coach. And this brought her to the point — which was, that she was sorry to say, on arriving, the poor child was nearly wild with a headache from fatigue and had gone to bed; and she had promised not to disturb her.

The undisguised amusement, mingled with relief, that had overspread Barker's face during this lively recital might have pricked the conscience of Mrs. Horncastle, but for some reason I fear it did not. But it emboldened her to go on. "I said I promised her that I would see she was n't disturbed; but, of course, now that *you*, her *husband*, have come, if" —

"Not for worlds," interrupted Barker earnestly. "I know poor Kitty's headaches, and I never disturb her, poor child, except when I'm thoughtless." And here one of the most thoughtful men in the world in his sensitive consideration of others beamed at her with such frank and wonderful eyes that the arch hypocrite before him with difficulty

suppressed a hysterical desire to laugh, and felt the conscious blood flush her to the root of her hair. "You know," he went on, with a sigh, half of relief and half of reminiscence, "that I often think I'm a great bother to a clear-headed, sensible girl like Kitty. She knows people so much better than I do. She's wonderfully equipped for the world, and, you see, I'm only 'lucky,' as everybody says, and I dare say part of my luck was to have got her. I'm very glad she's a friend of yours, you know, for somehow I fancied always that you were not interested in her, or that you did n't understand each other until now. It's odd that nice women don't always like nice women, is n't it? I'm glad she was with you; I was quite startled to learn she was here, and could n't make it out. I thought at first she might have got anxious about our little Sta, who is with me and the nurse at Hymettus. But I'm glad it was only a lark. I should n't wonder," he added, with a laugh, "although she always declares she is n't one of those 'doting, idiotic mothers,' that she found it a little dull without the boy, for all she thought it was better for *me* to take him somewhere for a change of air."

The situation was becoming more difficult for Mrs. Horncastle than she had conceived. There had been a certain excitement in its first direct appeal to her tact and courage, and even, she believed, an unselfish desire to save the relations between husband and wife if she could. But she had not calculated upon his unconscious revelations, nor upon their effect upon herself. She had concluded to believe that Kitty had, in a moment of folly, lent herself to this hare-brained escapade, but it now might be possible that it had been deliberately planned. Kitty had sent her husband and child away three weeks *before*. Had she told the whole truth? How long had this been going on? And if the soulless Van Loo had deserted her now, was it not, perhaps, the miserable ending of an intrigue rather than its beginning? Had she been as great a dupe of this woman as the husband before her? A new and double consciousness came over her that for a moment prevented her from meeting his honest eyes. She felt the shame of being an accomplice mingled with a fierce joy at the idea of a climax that might separate him from his wife forever.

Luckily he did not notice it, but with a continued sense of relief threw himself back in his chair, and glancing familiarly round the walls broke into his youthful laugh. "Lord! how I remember this room in the old days. It was Kitty's own private sitting-room, you know, and I used to think it looked just as fresh and pretty as she. I used to think her crayon drawing wonderful, and still more wonderful that she should have that unnecessary talent when it was quite enough for her to be just 'Kitty.' You know, don't you, how you feel at those times when you're quite happy in being inferior" — He stopped a moment with a sudden recollection that Mrs. Horneastle's marriage had been notoriously unhappy. "I mean," he went on with a shy little laugh and an innocent attempt at gallantry which the very directness of his simple nature made atrociously obvious, — "I mean what you've made lots of young fellows feel. There used to be a picture of Colonel Brigg on the mantelpiece, in full uniform, and signed by himself 'for Kitty;' and Lord! how jealous I was of it, for Kitty never took presents from gentlemen, and nobody

even was allowed in here, though she helped her father all over the hotel. She was awfully strict in those days," he interpolated, with a thoughtful look and a half-sigh; "but then she was n't married. I proposed to her in this very room! Lord! I remember how frightened I was." He stopped for an instant, and then said with a certain timidity, "Do you mind my telling you something about it?"

Mrs. Horncastle was hardly prepared to hear these ingenuous domestic details, but she smiled vaguely, although she could not suppress a somewhat impatient movement with her hands. Even Barker noticed it, but to her surprise moved a little nearer to her, and in a half-entreating way said, "I hope I don't bore you, but it's something confidential. Do you know that she first *refused* me?"

Mrs. Horncastle smiled, but could not resist a slight toss of her head. "I believe they all do when they are sure of a man."

"No!" said Barker eagerly, "you don't understand. I proposed to her because I thought I was rich. In a foolish moment I thought I had discovered that some old

stocks I had had acquired a fabulous value. She believed it, too, but because she thought I was now a rich man and she only a poor girl — a mere servant to her father's guests — she refused me. Refused me because she thought I might regret it in the future, because she would not have it said that she had taken advantage of my proposal only when I was rich enough to make it."

"Well?" said Mrs. Horncastle incredulously, gazing straight before her; "and then?"

"In about an hour I discovered my error, that my stocks were worthless, that I was still a poor man. I thought it only honest to return to her and tell her, even though I had no hope. And then she pitied me, and cried, and accepted me. I tell it to you as her friend." He drew a little nearer and quite fraternally laid his hand upon her own. "I know you won't betray me, though you may think it wrong for me to have told it; but I wanted you to know how good she was and true."

For a moment Mrs. Horncastle was amazed and discomfited, although she saw, with the inscrutable instinct of her sex, no

inconsistency between the Kitty of those days and the Kitty now shamefully hiding from her husband in the same hotel. No doubt Kitty had some good reason for her chivalrous act. But she could see the unmistakable effect of that act upon the more logically reasoning husband, and that it might lead him to be more merciful to the later wrong. And there was a keener irony that his first movement of unconscious kindness towards her was the outcome of his affection for his undeserving wife.

“You said just now she was more practical than you,” she said dryly. “Apart from this evidence of it, what other reasons have you for thinking so? Do you refer to her independence or her dealings in the stock market?” she added, with a laugh.

“No,” said Barker seriously, “for I do not think her quite practical there; indeed, I’m afraid she is about as bad as I am. But I’m glad you have spoken, for I can now talk confidentially with you, and as you and she are both in the same ventures, perhaps she will feel less compunction in hearing from you — as your own opinion — what I have to tell you than if I spoke to her

myself. I am afraid she trusts implicitly to Van Loo's judgment as her broker. I believe he is strictly honorable, but the general opinion of his business insight is not high. They — perhaps I ought to say *he* — have been at least so unlucky that they might have learned prudence. The loss of twenty thousand dollars in three months" —

"Twenty thousand!" echoed Mrs. Horncastle.

"Yes. Why, you knew that; it was in the mine you and she visited; or, perhaps," he added hastily, as he flushed at his indiscretion, "she did n't tell you that."

But Mrs. Horncastle as hastily said, "Yes — yes — of course, only I had forgotten the amount;" and he continued: —

"That loss would have frightened any man; but you women are more daring. Only Van Loo ought to have withdrawn. Don't you think so? Of course I could n't say anything to him without seeming to condemn my own wife; I could n't say anything to *her* because it's her own money."

"I did n't know that Mrs. Barker had any money of her own," said Mrs. Horncastle.

“ Well, I gave it to her,” said Barker, with sublime simplicity, “ and that would make it all the worse for me to speak about it.”

Mrs. Horncastle was silent. A new theory flashed upon her which seemed to reconcile all the previous inconsistencies of the situation. Van Loo, under the guise of a lover, was really possessing himself of Mrs. Barker's money. This accounted for the risks he was running in this escapade, which were so incongruous to the rascal's nature. He was calculating that the scandal of an intrigue would relieve him of the perils of criminal defalcation. It was compatible with Kitty's innocence, though it did not relieve her vanity of the part it played in this despicable comedy of passion. All that Mrs. Horncastle thought of now was the effect of its eventful revelation upon the man before her. Of course, he would overlook his wife's trustfulness and business ignorance — it would seem so like his own unselfish faith! That was the fault of all unselfish goodness; it even took the color of adjacent evil, without altering the nature of either. Mrs. Horncastle set her teeth tightly together, but

her beautiful mouth smiled upon Barker, though her eyes were bent upon the tablecloth before her.

“I shall do all I can to impress your views upon her,” she said at last, “though I fear they will have little weight if given as my own. And you overrate my general influence with her.”

Her handsome head drooped in such a thoughtful humility that Barker instinctively drew nearer to her. Besides, she had not lifted her dark lashes for some moments, and he had the still youthful habit of looking frankly into the eyes of those he addressed.

“No,” he said eagerly; “how could I? She could not help but love you and do as you would wish. I can’t tell you how glad and relieved I am to find that you and she have become such friends. You know I always thought you beautiful, I always thought you so clever — I was even a little frightened of you; but I never until now knew you were so *good*. No, stop! Yes, I *did* know it. Do you remember once in San Francisco, when I found you with Sta in your lap in the drawing-room? I

knew it then. You tried to make me think it was a whim — the fancy of a bored and worried woman. But I knew better. And I knew what you were thinking then. Shall I tell you?"

As her eyes were still cast down, although her mouth was still smiling, in his endeavors to look into them his face was quite near hers. He fancied that it bore the look she had worn once before.

"You were thinking," he said in a voice which had grown suddenly quite hesitating and tremulous, — he did not know why, — "that the poor little baby was quite friendless and alone. You were pitying it — you know you were — because there was no one to give it the loving care that was its due, and because it was intrusted to that hired nurse in that great hotel. You were thinking how you would love it if it were yours, and how cruel it was that Love was sent without an object to waste itself upon. You were : I saw it in your face."

She suddenly lifted her eyes and looked full into his with a look that held and possessed him. For a moment his whole soul seemed to tremble on the verge of their lus-

trous depths, and he drew back dizzy and frightened. What he saw there he never clearly knew ; but, whatever it was, it seemed to suddenly change his relations to her, to the room, to his wife, to the world without. It was a glimpse of a world of which he knew nothing. He had looked frankly and admiringly into the eyes of other pretty women ; he had even gazed into her own before, but never with this feeling. A sudden sense that what he had seen there he had himself evoked, that it was an answer to some question he had scarcely yet formulated, and that they were both now linked by an understanding and consciousness that was irretrievable, came over him. He rose awkwardly and went to the window. She rose also, but more leisurely and easily, moved one of the books on the table, smoothed out her skirts, and changed her seat to a little sofa. It is the woman who always comes out of these crucial moments unruffled.

“I suppose you will be glad to see your friend Mr. Demorest when you go back,” she said pleasantly ; “for of course he will be at Hymettus awaiting you.”

He turned eagerly, as he always did at

the name. But even then he felt that Demorest was no longer of such importance to him. He felt, too, that he was not yet quite sure of his voice or even what to say. As he hesitated she went on half playfully: "It seems hard that you had to come all the way here on such a bootless errand. You have n't even seen your wife yet."

The mention of his wife recalled him to himself, oddly enough, when Demorest's name had failed. But very differently. Out of his whirling consciousness came the instinctive feeling that he could not see her now. He turned, crossed the room, sat down on the sofa beside Mrs. Horncastle, and without, however, looking at her, said, with his eyes on the floor, "No; and I've been thinking that it's hardly worth while to disturb her so early to-morrow as I should have to go. So I think it's a good deal better to let her have a good night's rest, remain here quietly with you to-morrow until the stage leaves, and that both of you come over together. My horse is still saddled, and I will be back at Hymettus before Demorest has gone to bed."

He was obliged to look up at her as he

rose. Mrs. Horncastle was sitting erect, beautiful and dazzling as even he had never seen her before. For his resolution had suddenly lifted a great weight from her shoulders, — the dangerous meeting of husband and wife the next morning, and its results, whatever they might be, had been quietly averted. She felt, too, a half-frightened joy even in the constrained manner in which he had imparted his determination. That frankness which even she had sometimes found so crushing was gone.

“I really think you are quite right,” she said, rising also, “and, besides, you see, it will give me a chance to talk to her as you wished.”

“To talk to her as I wished?” echoed Barker abstractedly.

“Yes, about Van Loo, you know,” said Mrs. Horncastle, smiling.

“Oh, certainly — about Van Loo, of course,” he returned hurriedly.

“And then,” said Mrs. Horncastle brightly, “I’ll tell her. Stay!” she interrupted herself hurriedly. “Why need I say anything about your having been here *at all*? It might only annoy her, as you yourself sug-

gest." She stopped breathlessly with parted lips.

"Why, indeed?" said Barker vaguely. Yet all this was so unlike his usual truthfulness that he slightly hesitated.

"Besides," continued Mrs. Horncastle, noticing it, "you know you can always tell her later, if necessary." And she added with a charming mischievousness, "As she did n't tell you she was coming, I really don't see why you are bound to tell her that you were here."

The sophistry pleased Barker, even though it put him into a certain retaliating attitude towards his wife which he was not aware of feeling. But, as Mrs. Horncastle put it, it was only a playful attitude.

"Certainly," he said. "Don't say anything about it."

He moved to the door with his soft, broad-brimmed hat swinging between his fingers. She noticed for the first time that he looked taller in his long black serape and riding-boots, and, oddly enough, much more like the hero of an amorous tryst than Van Loo. "I know," she said brightly, "you are eager to get back to your old friend, and

it would be selfish for me to try to keep you longer. You have had a stupid evening, but you have made it pleasant to me by telling me what you thought of me. And before you go I want you to believe that I shall try to keep that good opinion." She spoke frankly in contrast to the slight worldly constraint of Barker's manner; it seemed as if they had changed characters. And then she extended her hand.

With a low bow, and without looking up, he took it. Again their pulses seemed to leap together with one accord and the same mysterious understanding. He could not tell if he had unconsciously pressed her hand or if she had returned the pressure. But when their hands unclasped it seemed as if it were the division of one flesh and spirit.

She remained standing by the open door until his footsteps passed down the staircase. Then she suddenly closed and locked the door with an instinct that Mrs. Barker might at once return now that he was gone, and she wished to be a moment alone to recover herself. But she presently opened it again and listened. There was a noise in the courtyard, but it sounded like the rattle

of wheels more than the clatter of a horseman. Then she was overcome — a sudden sense of pity for the unfortunate woman still hiding from her husband — and felt a momentary chivalrous exaltation of spirit. Certainly she had done “good” to that wretched “Kitty;” perhaps she had earned the epithet that Barker had applied to her. Perhaps that was the meaning of all this happiness to her, and the result was to be only the happiness and reconciliation of the wife and husband. This was to be her reward. I grieve to say that the tears had come into her beautiful eyes at this satisfactory conclusion, but she dashed them away and ran out into the hall. It was quite dark, but there was a faint glimmer on the opposite wall as if the door of Mrs. Barker’s bedroom were ajar to an eager listener. She flew towards the glimmer, and pushed the door open: the room was empty. Empty of Mrs. Barker, empty of her dressing-box, her reticule and shawl. She was gone.

Still, Mrs. Horncastle lingered; the woman might have got frightened and retreated to some further room at the opening of the door and the coming out of her husband.

She walked along the passage, calling her name softly. She even penetrated the dreary, half-lit public parlor, expecting to find her crouching there. Then a sudden wild idea took possession of her: the miserable wife had repented of her act and of her concealment, and had crept downstairs to await her husband in the office. She had told him some new lie, had begged him to take her with him, and Barker, of course, had assented. Yes, she now knew why she had heard the rattling wheels instead of the clattering hoofs she had listened for. They had gone together, as he first proposed, in the buggy.

She ran swiftly down the stairs and entered the office. The overworked clerk was busy and querulously curt. These women were always asking such idiotic questions. Yes, Mr. Barker had just gone.

"With Mrs. Barker in the buggy?" asked Mrs. Horncastle.

"No, as he came — on horseback. Mrs. Barker left *half an hour ago*."

"Alone?"

This was apparently too much for the long-suffering clerk. He lifted his eyes to

the ceiling, and then, with painful precision, and accenting every word with his pencil on the desk before him, said deliberately, "Mrs. George Barker — left — here — with her — escort — the — man she — was — always — asking — for — in — the — buggy — at exactly — 9.35." And he plunged into his work again.

Mrs. Horncastle turned, ran up the staircase, reëntered the sitting-room, and slamming the door behind her, halted in the centre of the room, panting, erect, beautiful, and menacing. And she was alone in this empty room — this deserted hotel. From this very room her husband had left her with a brutality on his lips. From this room the fool and liar she had tried to warn had gone to her ruin with a swindling hypocrite. And from this room the only man in the world she ever cared for had gone forth bewildered, wronged, and abused, and she knew now she could have kept and comforted him.

CHAPTER IV.

WHEN Philip Demorest left the stage-coach at the cross-roads he turned into the only wayside house, the blacksmith's shop, and, declaring his intention of walking over to Hymettus, asked permission to leave his hand-bag and wraps until they could be sent after him. The blacksmith was surprised that this "likely mannered," distinguished-looking "city man" should *walk* eight miles when he could ride, and tried to dissuade him, offering his own buggy. But he was still more surprised when Demorest, laying aside his duster, took off his coat, and, slinging it on his arm, prepared to set forth with the good-humored assurance that he would do the distance in a couple of hours and get in in time for supper. "I would n't be too sure of that," said the blacksmith grimly, "or even of getting a room. They're a stuck-up lot over there, and they ain't goin' to hump themselves over a chap who comes

traipsin' along the road like any tramp, with nary baggage." But Demorest laughingly accepted the risk, and taking his stout stick in one hand, pressed a gold coin into the blacksmith's palm, which was, however, declined with such reddening promptness that Demorest as promptly reddened and apologized. The habits of European travel had been still strong on him, and he felt a slight patriotic thrill as he said, with a grave smile, "Thank you, then; and thank you still more for reminding me that I am among my own 'people,'" and stepped lightly out into the road.

The air was still deliciously cool, but warmer currents from the heated pines began to alternate with the wind from the summit. He found himself sometimes walking through a stratum of hot air which seemed to exhale from the wood itself, while his head and breast were swept by the mountain breeze. He felt the old intoxication of the balmy-scented air again, and the five years of care and hopelessness laid upon his shoulders since he had last breathed its fragrance slipped from them like a burden. There had been but little change here; per-

haps the road was wider and the dust lay thicker, but the great pines still mounted in serried ranks on the slopes as before, with no gaps in their unending files. Here was the spot where the stagecoach had passed them that eventful morning when they were coming out of their camp-life into the world of civilization ; a little further back, the spot where Jack Hamlin had forced upon him that grim memento of the attempted robbery of their cabin, which he had kept ever since. He half smiled again at the superstitious interest that had made him keep it, with the intention of some day returning to bury it, with all recollections of the deed, under the site of the old cabin. As he went on in the vivifying influence of the air and scene, new life seemed to course through his veins ; his step seemed to grow as elastic as in the old days of their bitter but hopeful struggle for fortune, when he had gayly returned from his weekly tramp to Boomville laden with the scant provision procured by their scant earnings and dying credit. Those were the days when *her* living image still inspired his heart with faith and hope ; when everything was yet possible to youth and

love, and before the irony of fate had given him fortune with one hand only to withdraw *her* with the other. It was strange and cruel that coming back from his quest of rest and forgetfulness he should find only these youthful and sanguine dreams revive with his reviving vigor. He walked on more hurriedly as if to escape them, and was glad to be diverted by one or two carryalls and char-a-bancs filled with gayly dressed pleasure parties — evidently visitors to Hy-mettus — which passed him on the road. Here were the first signs of change. He recalled the train of pack-mules of the old days, the file of pole-and-basket carrying Chinese, the squaw with the papoose strapped to her shoulder, or the wandering and foot-sore prospector, who were the only wayfarers he used to meet. He contrasted their halts and friendly greetings with the insolent curiosity or undisguised contempt of the carriage folk, and smiled as he thought of the warning of the blacksmith. But this did not long divert him; he found himself again returning to his previous thought. Indeed, the face of a young girl in one of the carriages had quite startled him with its

resemblance to an old memory of his lost love as he saw her,—her frail, pale elegance encompassed in laces as she leaned back in her drive through Fifth Avenue, with eyes that lit up and became transfigured only as he passed. He tried to think of his useless quest in search of her last resting-place abroad ; how he had been baffled by the opposition of her surviving relations, already incensed by the thought that her decline had been the effect of her hopeless passion. He tried to recall the few frigid lines that reconveyed to him the last letter he had sent her, with the announcement of her death and the hope that “his persecutions” would now cease. A wild idea had sometimes come to him out of the very insufficiency of his knowledge of this climax, but he had always put it aside as a precursor of that madness which might end his ceaseless thought. And now it was returning to him, here, thousands of miles away from where she was peacefully sleeping, and even filling him with the vigor of youthful hope.

The brief mountain twilight was giving way now to the radiance of the rising moon.

He endeavored to fix his thoughts upon his partners who were to meet him at Hymettus after these long years of separation.

Hymettus! He recalled now the odd coincidence that he had mischievously used as a gag to his questioning fellow traveler; but now he had really come from a villa near Athens to find his old house thus classically rechristened after it, and thought of it with a gravity he had not felt before. He wondered who had named it. There was no suggestion of the soft, sensuous elegance of the land he had left in those great heroics of nature before him. Those enormous trees were no woods for fauns or dryads; they had their own godlike majesty of bulk and height, and as he at last climbed the summit and saw the dark-helmeted head of Black Spur before him, and beyond it the pallid, spiritual cloud of the Sierras, he did not think of Olympus. Yet for a moment he was startled, as he turned to the right, by the Doric-columned façade of a temple painted by the moonbeams and framed in an opening of the dark woods before him. It was not until he had reached it that he saw that it was the new wooden post-office of Heavy Tree Hill.

And now the buildings of the new settlement began to faintly appear. But the obscurity of the shadow and the equally disturbing unreality of the moonlight confused him in his attempts to recognize the old landmarks. A broad and well-kept winding road had taken the place of the old steep, but direct trail to his cabin. He had walked for some moments in uncertainty, when a sudden sweep of the road brought the full crest of the hill above and before him, crowned with a tiara of lights, overtopping a long base of flashing windows. That was all that was left of Heavy Tree Hill. The old foreground of buckeye and odorous ceanothus was gone. Even the great grove of pines behind it had vanished.

There was already a stir of life in the road, and he could see figures moving slowly along a kind of sterile, formal terrace spread with a few dreary marble vases and plaster statues which had replaced the natural slope and the great quartz buttresses of outcrop that supported it. Presently he entered a gate, and soon found himself in the carriage drive leading to the hotel veranda. A number of fair promenaders were facing the

keen mountain night wind in wraps and furs. Demorest had replaced his coat, but his boots were red with dust, and as he ascended the steps he could see that he was eyed with some superciliousness by the guests and with considerable suspicion by the servants. One of the latter was approaching him with an insolent smile when a figure darted from the vestibule, and, brushing the waiter aside, seized Demorest's two hands in his and held him at arm's length.

"Demorest, old man!"

"Stacy, old chap!"

"But where's your team? I've had all the spare hostlers and hall-boys listening for you at the gate. And where's Barker? When he found you'd given the dead-cut to the railroad — *his* railroad, you know — he loped over to Boomville after you."

Demorest briefly explained that he had walked by the old road and probably missed him. But by this time the waiters, crushed by the spectacle of this travel-worn stranger's affectionate reception by the great financial magnate, were wildly applying their brushes and handkerchiefs to his trousers and boots until Stacy again swept them away.

“Get off, all of you! Now, Phil, you come with me. The house is full, but I’ve made the manager give you a lady’s drawing-room suite. When you telegraphed you’d meet us *here* there was no chance to get anything else. It’s really Mrs. Van Loo’s family suite; but they were sent for to go to Marysville yesterday, and so we’ll run you in for the night.”

“But” — protested Demorest.

“Nonsense!” said Stacy, dragging him away. “We’ll pay for it; and I reckon the old lady won’t object to taking her share of the damage either, or she is n’t Van Loo’s mother. Come.”

Demorest felt himself hurried forward by the energetic Stacy, preceded by the obsequious manager, through a corridor to a handsomely furnished suite, into whose bathroom Stacy incontinently thrust him.

“There! Wash up; and by the time you’re ready Barker ought to be back, and we’ll have supper. It’s waiting for us in the other room.”

“But how about Barker, the dear boy?” persisted Demorest, holding open the door. “Tell me, is he well and happy?”

“About as well as we all are,” said Stacy quickly, yet with a certain dry significance. “Never mind now; wait until you see him.”

The door closed. When Demorest had finished washing, and wiped away the last red stain of the mountain road, he found Stacy seated by the window of the larger sitting-room. In the centre a table was spread for supper. A bright fire of hickory logs burnt on a marble hearth between two large windows that gave upon the distant outline of Black Spur. As Stacy turned towards him, by the light of the shaded lamp and flickering fire, Demorest had a good look at the face of his old friend and partner. It was as keen and energetic as ever, with perhaps an even more hawk-like activity visible in the eye and nostril; but it was more thoughtful and reticent in the lines of the mouth under the closely clipped beard and mustache, and when he looked up, at first there were two deep lines or furrows across his low broad forehead. Demorest fancied, too, that there was a little of the old fighting look in his eye, but it softened quickly as his friend approached, and he burst out with his curt but honest single-

syllabled laugh. "Ha! You look a little less like a roving Apache than you did when you came. I really thought the waiters were going to chuck you. And you *are* tanned! Darned if you don't look like the profile stamped on a Continental penny! But here's luck and a welcome back, old man!"

Demorest passed his arm around the neck of his seated partner, and grasping his up-raised hand said, looking down with a smile, "And now about Barker."

"Oh, Barker, d—n him! He's the same unshakable, unchangeable, ungrow-up-able Barker! With the devil's own luck, too! Waltzing into risks and waltzing out of 'em. With fads enough to put him in the insane asylum if people did not prefer to keep him out of it to help 'em. Always believing in everybody, until they actually believe in themselves, and — shake him! And he's got a wife that's making a fool of herself, and I should n't wonder in time — of him!"

Demorest pressed his hand over his partner's mouth. "Come, Jim! You know you never really liked that marriage, simply be-

cause you thought that old man Carter made a good thing of it. And you never seem to have taken into consideration the happiness Barker got out of it. For he *did* love the girl. And he still is happy, is he not?" he added quickly, as Stacy uttered a grunt.

"As happy as a man can be who has his child here with a nurse while his wife is gallivanting in San Francisco, and throwing her money — and Lord knows what else — away at the bidding of a smooth-tongued, shady operator."

"Does *he* complain of it?" asked Demorest.

"Not he; the fool trusts her!" said Stacy curtly.

Demorest laughed. "That is happiness! Come, Jim! don't let us begrudge him that. But I've heard that his affairs have again prospered."

"He built this railroad and this hotel. The bank owns both now. He did n't care to keep money in them after they were a success; said he was n't an engineer nor a hotel-keeper, and drew it out to find something new. But here he comes," he added, as a horseman dashed into the drive before

the hotel. "Question him yourself. You know you and he always get along best without me."

In another moment Barker had burst into the room, and in his first tempestuous greeting of Demorest the latter saw little change in his younger partner as he held him at arm's length to look at him. "Why, Barker boy, you have n't got a bit older since the day when — you remember — you went over to Boomville to cash your bonds, and then came back and burst upon us like this to tell us you were a beggar."

"Yes," laughed Barker, "and all the while you fellows were holding four aces up your sleeve in the shape of the big strike."

"And you, Georgy, old boy," returned Demorest, swinging Barker's two hands backwards and forwards, "were holding a royal flush up yours in the shape of your engagement to Kitty."

The fresh color died out of Barker's cheek even while the frank laugh was still on his mouth. He turned his face for a moment towards the window, and a swift and almost involuntary glance passed between the others. But he almost as quickly

turned his glistening eyes back to Demorest again, and said eagerly, "Yes, dear Kitty! You shall see her and the baby to-morrow."

Then they fell upon the supper with the appetites of the Past, and for some moments they all talked eagerly and even noisily together, all at the same time, with even the spirits of the Past. They recalled every detail of their old life; eagerly and impetuously recounted the old struggles, hopes, and disappointments, gave the strange importance of schoolboys to unimportant events, and a mystic meaning to a shibboleth of their own; roared over old jokes with a delight they had never since given to new; reawakened idiotic nicknames and bywords with intense enjoyment; grew grave, anxious, and agonized over forgotten names, trifling dates, useless distances, ineffective records, and feeble chronicles of their domestic economy. It was the thoughtful and melancholy Demorest who remembered the exact color and price paid for a certain shirt bought from a Greaser peddler amidst the envy of his companions; it was the financial magnate, Stacy, who could inform them what were the exact days they had saleratus bread

and when flapjacks ; it was the thoughtless and mercurial Barker who recalled with unheard-of accuracy, amidst the applause of the others, the full name of the Indian squaw who assisted at their washing. Even then they were almost feverishly loath to leave the subject, as if the Past, at least, was secure to them still, and they were even doubtful of their own free and full accord in the Present. Then they slipped rather reluctantly into their later experiences, but with scarcely the same freedom or spontaneity ; and it was noticeable that these records were elicited from Barker by Stacy or from Stacy by Barker for the information of Demorest, often with chaffing and only under good-humored protest. " Tell Demorest how you broke the 'Copper Ring,' " from the admiring Barker, or, " Tell Demorest how your d—d foolishness in buying up the right and plant of the Ditch Company got you control of the railroad," from the mischievous Stacy, were challenges in point. Presently they left the table, and, to the astonishment of the waiters who removed the cloth, common brier-wood pipes, thoughtfully provided by Barker in commemoration

of the Past, were lit, and they ranged themselves in armchairs before the fire quite unconsciously in their old attitudes. The two windows on either side of the hearth gave them the same view that the open door of the old cabin had made familiar to them, the league-long valley below the shadowy bulk of the Black Spur rising in the distance, and, still more remote, the pallid snow-line that soared even beyond its crest.

As in the old time, they were for many moments silent; and then, as in the old time, it was the irrepressible Barker who broke the silence. "But Stacy does not tell you anything about his friend, the beautiful Mrs. Horncastle. You know he's the guardian of one of the finest women in California — a woman as noble and generous as she is handsome. And think of it! He's protecting her from her brute of a husband, and looking after her property. Isn't it good and chivalrous of him?"

The irrepressible laughter of the two men brought only wonder and reproachful indignation into the widely opened eyes of Barker. *He* was perfectly sincere. He had been thinking of Stacy's admiration for Mrs.

Horncastle in his ride from Boomville, and, strange to stay, yet characteristic of his nature, it was equally the natural outcome of his interview with her and the singular effect she had upon him. That he (Barker) thoroughly sympathized with her only convinced him that Stacy must feel the same for her, and that, no doubt, she must respond to him equally. And how noble it was in his old partner, with his advantages of position in the world and his protecting relations to her, not to avail himself of this influence upon her generous nature. If he himself — a married man and the husband of Kitty — was so conscious of her charm, how much greater it must be to the free and *inexperienced* Stacy.

The italics were in Barker's thought; for in those matters he felt that Stacy and even Demorest, occupied in other things, had not his knowledge. There was no idea or consciousness of heroically sacrificing himself or Mrs. Horncastle in this. I am afraid there was not even an idea of a superior morality in himself in giving up the possibility of loving her. Ever since Stacy had first seen her he had fancied that Stacy liked her, —

indeed, Kitty fancied it, too, — and it seemed almost providential now that he should know how to assist his old partner to happiness. For it was inconceivable that Stacy should not be able to rescue this woman from her shameful bonds, or that she should not consent to it through his (Barker's) arguments and entreaties. To a "champion of dames" this seemed only right and proper. In his unflinching optimism he translated Stacy's laugh as embarrassment and Demorest's as only ignorance of the real question. But Demorest had noticed, if he had not, that Stacy's laugh was a little nervously prolonged for a man of his temperament, and that he had cast a very keen glance at Barker. A messenger arriving with a telegram brought from Boomville called Stacy momentarily away, and Barker was not slow to take advantage of his absence.

"I wish, Phil," he said, hitching his chair closer to Demorest, "that you would think seriously of this matter, and try to persuade Stacy — who, I believe, is more interested in Mrs. Horncastle than he cares to show — to put a little of that determination in love that he has shown in business. She's an

awfully fine woman, and in every way suited to him, and he is letting an absurd sense of pride and honor keep him from influencing her to get rid of her impossible husband. There's no reason," continued Barker in a burst of enthusiastic simplicity, "that *because* she has found some one she likes better, and who would treat her better, that she should continue to stick to that beast whom all California would gladly see her divorced from. I never could understand that kind of argument, could you?"

Demorest looked at his companion's glowing cheek and kindling eye with a smile. "A good deal depends upon the side from which you argue. But, frankly, Barker boy, though I think I know you in all your phases, I am not prepared yet to accept you as a match-maker! However, I'll think it over, and find out something more of this from your goddess, who seems to have bewitched you both. But what does Mistress Kitty say to your admiration?"

Barker's face clouded, but instantly brightened. "Oh, they're the best of friends; they're quite like us, you know, even to larks they have together." He stopped and

colored at his slip. But Demorest, who had noticed his change of expression, was more concerned at the look of half incredulity and half suspicion with which Stacy, who had reëntered the room in time to hear Barker's speech, was regarding his unconscious younger partner.

"I did n't know that Mrs. Horncastle and Mrs. Barker were such friends," he said dryly as he sat down again. But his face presently became so abstracted that Demorest said gayly: —

"Well, Jim, I'm glad I'm not a Napoleon of Finance! I could n't stand it to have my privacy or my relaxation broken in upon at any moment, as yours was just now. What confounded somersault in stocks has put that face on you?"

Stacy looked up quickly with his brief laugh. "I'm afraid you'd be none the wiser if I told you. That was a pony express messenger from New York. You remember how Barker, that night of the strike, when we were sitting together here, or very near here, proposed that we ought to have a password or a symbol to call us together in case of emergency, for each other's help?"

Well, let us say I have two partners, one in Europe and one in New York. That was my password."

"And, I hope, no more serious than ours," added Demorest.

Stacy laughed his short laugh. Nevertheless, the conversation dragged again. The feverish gayety of the early part of the evening was gone, and they seemed to be suffering from the reaction. They fell into their old attitudes, looking from the firelight to the distant bulk of Black Spur without a word. The occasional sound of the voices of promenaders on the veranda at last ceased; there was the noise of the shutting of heavy doors below, and Barker rose.

"You'll excuse me, boys; but I must go and say good-night to little Sta, and see that he's all right. I haven't seen him since I got back. But" — to Demorest — "you'll see him to-morrow, when Kitty comes. It is as much as my life is worth to show him before she certifies him as being presentable." He paused, and then added: "Don't wait up, you fellows, for me; sometimes the little chap won't let me go. It's as if he thought, now Kitty's away, I was all he had. But I'll

be up early in the morning and see you. I dare say you and Stacy have a heap to say to each other on business, and you won't miss me. So I'll say good-night." He laughed lightly, pressed the hands of his partners in his usual hearty fashion, and went out of the room, leaving the gloom a little deeper than before. It was so unusual for Barker to be the first to leave anybody or anything in trouble that they both noticed it. "But for that," said Demorest, turning to Stacy as the door closed, "I should say the dear fellow was absolutely unchanged. But he seemed a little anxious to-night."

"I should n't wonder. He's got two women on his mind,—as if one was not enough."

"I don't understand. You say his wife is foolish, and this other"—

"Never mind that now," interrupted Stacy, getting up and putting down his pipe. "Let's talk a little business. That other stuff will keep."

"By all means," said Demorest, with a smile, settling down into his chair a little wearily, however. "I forgot business. And I forgot, my dear Jim, to congratulate you.

I've heard all about you, even in New York. You're the man who, according to everybody, now holds the finances of the Pacific Slope in his hands. And," he added, leaning affectionately towards his old partner, "I don't know any one better equipped in honesty, straightforwardness, and courage for such a responsibility than you."

"I only wish," said Stacy, looking thoughtfully at Demorest, "that I did n't hold nearly a million of your money included in the finances of the Pacific Slope."

"Why," said the smiling Demorest, "as long as I am satisfied?"

"Because *I* am not. If you're satisfied, I'm a wretched idiot and not fit for my position. Now, look here, Phil. When you wrote me to sell out your shares in the Wheat Trust I was a little staggered. I knew your gait, my boy, and I knew, too, that, while you did n't know enough to trust your own opinions or feeling, you knew too much to trust any one's opinion that was n't first-class. So I reckoned you had the straight tip; but *I* did n't see it. Now, I ought not to have been staggered if I was fit for your confidence, or, if I was staggered,

I ought to have had enough confidence in myself not to mind you. See?"

"I admit your logic, old man," said Demorest, with an amused face, "but I don't see your premises. *When* did I tell you to sell out?"

"Two days ago. You wrote just after you arrived."

"I have never written to you since I arrived. I only telegraphed to you to know where we should meet, and received your message to come here."

"You never wrote me from San Francisco?"

"Never."

Stacy looked concernedly at his friend. Was he in his right mind? He had heard of cases where melancholy brooding on a fixed idea had affected the memory. He took from his pocket a letter-case, and selecting a letter handed it to Demorest without speaking.

Demorest glanced at it, turned it over, read its contents, and in a grave voice said, "There is something wrong here. It is like my handwriting, but I never wrote the letter, nor has it been in my hand before."

Stacy sprang to his side. "Then it's a forgery!"

"Wait a moment." Demorest, who, although very grave, was the more collected of the two, went to a writing-desk, selected a sheet of paper, and took up a pen. "Now," he said, "dictate that letter to me."

Stacy began, Demorest's pen rapidly following him: —

"DEAR JIM, — On receipt of this get rid of my Wheat Trust shares at whatever figure you can. From the way things pointed in New York" —

"Stop!" interrupted Demorest.

"Well?" said Stacy impatiently.

"Now, my dear Jim," said Demorest plaintively, "when did you ever know me to write such a sentence as 'the way things pointed'?"

"Let me finish reading," said Stacy. This literary sensitiveness at such a moment seemed little short of puerility to the man of business.

"From the way things pointed in New York," continued Stacy, "and from private advices received, this seems to be the only prudent course before the feathers

begin to fly. Longing to see you again and the dear old stamping-ground at Heavy Tree. Love to Barker. Has the dear old boy been at any fresh crank lately?

“Yours, *to Jim* PHIL DEMOREST.”

The dictation and copy finished together. Demorest laid the freshly written sheet beside the letter Stacy had produced. They were very much alike and yet quite distinct from each other. Only the signature seemed identical.

“That’s the invariable mistake with the forger,” said Demorest; “he always forgets that signatures ought to be identical with the text rather than with each other.”

But Stacy did not seem to hear this or require further proof. His face was quite gray and his lips compressed until lost in his closely set beard as he gazed fixedly out of the window. For the first time, really concerned and touched, Demorest laid his hand gently on his shoulder.

“Tell me, Jim, how much does this mean to you — apart from me? Don’t think of me.”

“I don’t know yet,” said Stacy slowly. “That’s the trouble. And I won’t know

until I know who's at the bottom of it. Does anybody know of your affairs with me?"

"No one."

"No confidential friend, eh?"

"None."

"No one who has access to your secrets? No — no — woman? Excuse me, Phil," he said, as a peculiar look passed over Demorest's face, "but this is business."

"No," he returned, with that gentleness that used to frighten them in the old days, "it's ignorance. You fellows always say 'Cherchez la femme' when you can't say anything else. Come now," he went on more brightly, "look at the letter. Here's a man, commercially educated, for he has used the usual business formulas, 'on receipt of this,' and 'advices received,' which I won't merely say *I* don't use, but which few but commercial men use. Next, here's a man who uses slang, not only ineptly, but artificially, to give the letter the easy, familiar turn it has n't from beginning to end. I need only say, my dear Stacy, that I don't write slang to you, but that nobody who understands slang ever writes it in that

way. And then the knowledge of my opinion of Barker is such as might be gained from the reading of my letters by a person who could n't comprehend my feelings. Now, let me play inquisitor for a few moments. Has anybody access to my letters to you?"

"No one. I keep them locked up in a cabinet. I only make memorandums of your instructions, which I give to my clerks, but never your letters."

"But your clerks sometimes see you make memorandums from them?"

"Yes, but none of them have the ability to do this sort of thing, nor the opportunity of profiting by it."

"Has any woman — now this is not retaliation, my dear Jim, for I fancy I detect a woman's cleverness and a woman's stupidity in this forgery — any access to your secrets or my letters? A woman's villainy is always effective for the moment, but always defective when probed."

The look of scorn which passed over Stacy's face was quite as distinct as Demorest's previous protest, as he said contemptuously, "I'm not such a fool as to mix

up petticoats with my business, whatever I do."

"Well, one thing more. I have told you that in my opinion the forger has a commercial education or style, that he does n't know me nor Barker, and don't understand slang. Now, I have to add what must have occurred to you, Jim, that the forger is either a coward, or his object is not altogether mercenary: for the same ability displayed in this letter would on the signature alone — had it been on a check or draft — have drawn from your bank twenty times the amount concerned. Now, what is the actual loss by this forgery?"

"Very little; for you've got a good price for your stocks, considering the depreciation in realizing suddenly on so large an amount. I told my broker to sell slowly and in small quantities to avoid a panic. But the real loss is the control of the stock."

"But the amount I had was not enough to affect that," said Demorest.

"No, but I was carrying a large amount myself, and together we controlled the market, and now I have unloaded, too."

"You sold out! and with your doubts?" said Demorest.

“That’s just it,” said Stacy, looking steadily at his companion’s face, “because I *had* doubts, and it won’t do for me to have them. I ought either to have disobeyed your letter and kept your stock and my own, or have done just what I did. I might have hedged on my own stock, but I don’t believe in hedging. There is no middle course to a man in my business if he wants to keep at the top. No great success, no great power, was ever created by it.”

Démorest smiled. “Yet you accept the alternative also, which is ruin?”

“Precisely,” said Stacy. “When you returned the other day you were bound to find me what I was or a beggar. But nothing between. However,” he added, “this has nothing to do with the forgery, or,” he smiled grimly, “everything to do with it. Hush! Barker is coming.”

There was a quick step along the corridor approaching the room. The next moment the door flew open to the bounding step and laughing face of Barker. Whatever of thoughtfulness or despondency he had carried from the room with him was completely gone. With his amazing buoyancy and

power of reaction he was there again in his usual frank, cheerful simplicity.

“I thought I’d come in and say good-night,” he began, with a laugh. “I got Sta asleep after some high jinks we had together, and then I reckoned it was n’t the square thing to leave just you two together, the first night you came. And I remembered I had some business to talk over, too, so I thought I’d chip in again and take a hand. It’s only the shank of the evening yet,” he continued gayly, “and we ought to sit up at least long enough to see the old snow-line vanish, as we did in old times. But I say,” he added suddenly, as he glanced from the one to the other, “you’ve been having it pretty strong already. Why, you both look as you did that night the back-water of the South Fork came into our cabin. What’s up?”

“Nothing,” said Demorest hastily, as he caught a glance of Stacy’s impatient face. “Only all business is serious, Barker boy, though you don’t seem to feel it so.”

“I reckon you’re right there,” said Barker, with a chuckle. “People always laugh, of course, when I talk business, so it might

make it a little livelier for you and more of a change if I chipped in now. Only I don't know which you 'll do. Hand me a pipe. Well," he continued, filling the pipe Demorest shoved towards him, "you see, I was in Sacramento yesterday, and I went into Van Loo's branch office, as I heard he was there, and I wanted to find out something about Kitty's investments, which I don't think he's managing exactly right. He was n't there, however, but as I was waiting I heard his clerks talk about a drop in the Wheat Trust, and that there was a lot of it put upon the market. They seemed to think that something had happened, and it was going down still further. Now I knew it was your pet scheme, and that Phil had a lot of shares in it, too, so I just slipped out and went to a broker's and told him to buy all he could of it. And, by Jove! I was a little taken aback when I found what I was in for, for everybody seemed to have unloaded, and I found I had n't money enough to pay margins, but I knew that Demorest was here, and I reckoned on his seeing me through." He stopped and colored, but added hopefully, "I reckon I'm safe, anyway, for just

as the thing was over those same clerks of Van Loo's came bounding into the office to buy up everything. And offered to take it off my hands and pay the margins."

"And you?" said both men eagerly, and in a breath.

Barker stared at them, and reddened and paled by turns. "I held on," he stammered. "You see, boys" —

Both men had caught him by the arms. "How much have you got?" they said, shaking him as if to precipitate the answer.

"It's a heap!" said Barker. "It's a ghastly lot now I think of it. I'm afraid I'm in for fifty thousand, if a cent."

To his infinite astonishment and delight he was alternately hugged and tossed backwards and forwards between the two men quite in the fashion of the old days. Breathless but laughing, he at length gasped out, "What does it all mean?"

"Tell him everything, Jim, — *everything*," said Demorest quickly.

Stacy briefly related the story of the forgery, and then laid the letter and its copy before him. But Barker only read the forgery.

“How could *you*, Stacy — one of the three partners of Heavy Tree — be deceived! Don't you see it's Phil's handwriting — but it is n't *Phil!*”

“But have you any idea *who* it is?” said Stacy.

“Not me,” said Barker, with widely opened eyes. “You see it must be somebody whom we are familiar with. I can't imagine such a scoundrel.”

“How did *you* know that Demorest had stock?” asked Stacy.

“He told me in one of his letters and advised me to go into it. But just then Kitty wanted money, I think, and I did n't go in.”

“I remember it,” struck in Demorest. “But surely it was no secret. My name would be on the transfer books for any one to see.”

“Not so,” said Stacy quickly. “You were one of the original shareholders; there was no transfer, and the books as well as the shares of the company were in my hands.”

“And your clerks?” added Demorest. Stacy was silent. After a pause he

asked, "Did anybody ever see that letter, Barker?"

"No one but myself and Kitty."

"And would she be likely to talk of it?" continued Stacy.

"Of course not. Why should she? Whom could she talk to?" Yet he stopped suddenly, and then with his characteristic reaction added, with a laugh, "Why no, certainly not."

"Of course, everybody knew that you had bought the shares at Sacramento?"

"Yes. Why, you know I told you the Van Loo clerks came to me and wanted to take it off my hands."

"Yes, I remember; the Van Loo clerks; they knew it, of course," said Stacy with a grim smile. "Well, boys," he said, with sudden alacrity, "I'm going to turn in, for by sun-up to-morrow I must be on my way to catch the first train at the Divide for 'Frisco. We'll hunt this thing down together, for I reckon we're all concerned in it," he added, looking at the others, "and once more we're partners as in the old times. Let us even say that I've given Barker's signal or password," he added, with a laugh,

“and we’ll stick together. Barker boy,” he went on, grasping his younger partner’s hand, “your instinct has saved us this time; d—d if I don’t sometimes think it better than any other man’s sabe; only,” he dropped his voice slightly, “I wish you had it in other things than *finance*. Phil, I’ve a word to say to you alone before I go. I may want you to follow me.”

“But what can I do?” said Barker eagerly. “You’re not going to leave me out.”

“You’ve done quite enough for us, old man,” said Stacy, laying his hand on Barker’s shoulder. “And it may be for *us* to do something for *you*. Trot off to bed now, like a good boy. I’ll keep you posted when the time comes.”

Shoving the protesting and leave-taking Barker with paternal familiarity from the room, he closed the door and faced Demorest.

“He’s the best fellow in the world,” said Stacy quietly, “and has saved the situation; but we must n’t trust too much to him for the present — not even seem to.”

“Nonsense, man!” said Demorest impatiently. “You’re letting your prejudices

go too far. Do you mean to say that you suspect his wife."

"D—n his wife!" said Stacy almost savagely. "Leave her out of this. It's Van Loo that I suspect. It was Van Loo who I knew was behind it, who expected to profit by it, and now we have lost him."

"But how?" said Demorest, astonished.

"How?" repeated Stacy impatiently. "You know what Barker said? Van Loo, either through stupidity, fright, or the wish to get the lowest prices, was too late to buy up the market. If he had, we might have openly declared the forgery, and if it was known that he or his friends had profited by it, even if we could not have proven his actual complicity, we could at least have made it too hot for him in California. But," said Stacy, looking intently at his friend, "do you know how the case stands now?"

"Well," said Demorest, a little uneasily under his friend's keen eyes, "we've lost that chance, but we've kept control of the stock."

"You think so? Well, let me tell you how the case stands and the price we pay for it," said Stacy deliberately, as he folded

his arms and gazed at Demorest. "You and I, well known as old friends and former partners, for no apparent reason — for we cannot prove the forgery now — have thrown upon the market all our stock, with the usual effect of depreciating it. Another old friend and former partner has bought it in and sent up the price. A common trick, a vulgar trick, but not a trick worthy of James Stacy or Stacy's Bank!"

"But why not simply declare the forgery without making any specific charge against Van Loo?"

"Do you imagine, Phil, that any man would believe it, and the story of a providentially appointed friend like Barker who saved us from loss? Why, all California, from Cape Mendocino to Los Angeles, would roar with laughter over it! No! We must swallow it and the reputation of 'jockeying' with the Wheat Trust, too. That Trust's as good as done for, for the present! Now you know why I didn't want poor Barker to know it, nor have much to do with our search for the forger."

"It would break the dear fellow's heart if he knew it," said Demorest.

“ Well, it’s to save him from having his heart broken further that I intend to find out this forger,” said Stacy grimly. “ Good-night, Phil! I’ll telegraph to you when I want you, and then *come!* ”

With another grip of the hand he left Demorest to his thoughts. In the first excitement of meeting his old partners, and in the later discovery of the forgery, Demorest had been diverted from his old sorrow, and for the time had forgotten it in sympathetic interest with the present. But, to his horror, when alone again, he found that interest growing as remote and vapid as the stories they had laughed over at the table, and even the excitement of the forged letter and its consequences began to be as unreal, as impotent, as shadowy, as the memory of the attempted robbery in the old cabin on that very spot. He was ashamed of that selfishness which still made him cling to this past, so much his own, that he knew it debarred him from the human sympathy of his comrades. And even Barker, in whose courtship and marriage he had tried to resuscitate his youthful emotions and condone his selfish errors — even the suggestion of his unhappi-

ness only touched him vaguely. He would no longer be a slave to the Past, or the memory that had deluded him a few hours ago. He walked to the window; alas, there was the same prospect that had looked upon his dreams, had lent itself to his old visions. There was the eternal outline of the hills; there rose the steadfast pines; there was no change in *them*. It was this surrounding constancy of nature that had affected him. He turned away and entered the bedroom. Here he suddenly remembered that the mother of this vague enemy, Van Loo, — for his feeling towards him was still vague, as few men really hate the personality they don't know, — had only momentarily vacated it, and to his distaste of his own intrusion was now added the profound irony of his sleeping in the same bed lately occupied by the mother of the man who was suspected of having forged his name. He smiled faintly and looked around the apartment. It was handsomely furnished, and although it still had much of the characterlessness of the hotel room, it was distinctly flavored by its last occupant, and still brightened by that mysterious instinct of the sex which is inevi-

table. Where a man would have simply left his forgotten slippers or collars there was a glass of still unfaded flowers; the cold marble top of the dressing-table was littered with a few linen and silk toilet covers; and on the mantel-shelf was a sheaf of photographs. He walked towards them mechanically, glanced at them abstractedly, and then stopped suddenly with a beating heart. Before him was the picture of his past, the photograph of the one woman who had filled his life!

He cast a hurried glance around the room as if he half expected to see the original start up before him, and then eagerly seized it and hurried with it to the light. Yes! yes! It was *she*, — she as she had lived in his actual memory; she as she had lived in his dream. He saw her sweet eyes, but the frightened, innocent trouble had passed from them; there was the sensitive elegance of her graceful figure in evening dress; but the figure was fuller and maturer. Could he be mistaken by some wonderful resemblance acting upon his too willing brain? He turned the photograph over. No; there on the other side, written in her own childlike

hand, endeared and familiar to his recollection, was her own name, and the date! It was surely she!

How did it come there? Did the Van Loos know her? It was taken in Venice; there was the address of the photographers. The Van Loos were foreigners, he remembered; they had traveled; perhaps had met her there in 1858: that was the date in her handwriting; that was the date on the photographer's address—1858. Suddenly he laid the photograph down, took with trembling fingers a letter-case from his pocket, opened it, and laid his last letter to her, indorsed with the cruel announcement of her death, before him on the table. He passed his hand across his forehead and opened the letter. It was dated 1856! The photograph must have been taken two years *after* her alleged death!

He examined it again eagerly, fixedly, tremblingly. A wild impulse to summon Barker or Stacy on the spot was restrained with difficulty and only when he remembered that they could not help him. Then he began to oscillate between a joy and a new fear, which now, for the first time, began to dawn

upon him. If the news of her death had been a fiendish trick of her relations, why had *she* never sought him? It was not ill health, restraint, nor fear; there was nothing but happiness and the strength of youth and beauty in that face and figure. *He* had not disappeared from the world; he was known of men; more, his memorable good fortune must have reached her ears. Had he wasted all these miserable years to find himself abandoned, forgotten, perhaps even a dupe? For the first time the sting of jealousy entered his soul. Perhaps, unconsciously to himself, his strange and varying feelings that afternoon had been the gathering climax of his mental condition; at all events, in the sudden revulsion there was a shaking off of his apathetic thought; there was activity, even if it was the activity of pain. Here was a mystery to be solved, a secret to be discovered, a past wrong to be exposed, an enemy or, perhaps, even a faithless love to be punished. Perhaps he had even saved his reason at the expense of his love. He quickly replaced the photograph on the mantel-shelf, returned the letter carefully to his pocket-book, — no longer a sou-

venir of the past, but a proof of treachery, — and began to mechanically undress himself. He was quite calm now, and went to bed with a strange sense of relief, and slept as he had not slept since he was a boy.

The whole hotel had sunk to rest by this time, and then began the usual slow, nightly invasion and investment of it by nature. For all its broad verandas and glaring terraces, its long ranges of windows and glittering crest of cupola and tower, it gradually succumbed to the more potent influences around it, and became their sport and playground. The mountain breezes from the distant summit swept down upon its flimsy structure, shook the great glass windows as with a strong hand, and sent the balm of bay and spruce through every chink and cranny. In the great hall and corridors the carpets billowed with the intruding blast along the floors; there was the murmur of the pines in the passages, and the damp odor of leaves in the dining-room. There was the cry of night birds in the creaking cupola, and the swift rush of dark wings past bedroom windows. Lissome shapes crept along the terraces between the stolid

wooden statues, or, bolder, scampered the whole length of the great veranda. In the lulling of the wind the breath of the woods was everywhere; even the aroma of swelling sap — as if the ghastly stumps on the deforested slope behind the hotel were bleeding afresh in the dewless night — stung the eyes and nostrils of the sleepers.

It was, perhaps, from such cause as this that Barker was awakened suddenly by the voice of the boy from the crib beside him, crying, “Mamma! mamma!” Taking the child in his arms, he comforted him, saying she would come that morning, and showed him the faint dawn already veiling with color the ghostly pallor of the Sierras. As they looked at it a great star shot forth from its brethren and fell. It did not fall perpendicularly, but seemed for some seconds to slip along the slopes of Black Spur, gleaming through the trees like a chariot of fire. It pleased the child to say that it was the light of mamma’s buggy that was fetching her home, and it pleased the father to encourage the boy’s fancy. And talking thus in confidential whispers they fell asleep once more, the father — himself a child in

so many things — holding the smaller and frailer hand in his.

They did not know that on the other side of the Divide the wife and mother, scared, doubting, and desperate, by the side of her scared, doubting, and desperate accomplice, was flying down the slope on her night-long road to ruin. Still less did they know that, with the early singing birds, a careless horseman, emerging from the trail as the dust-stained buggy dashed past him, glanced at it with a puzzled air, uttered a quiet whistle of surprise, and then, wheeling his horse, gayly cantered after it.

CHAPTER V.

IN the exercise of his arduous profession, Jack Hamlin had sat up all night in the magnolia saloon of the Divide, and as it was rather early to go to bed, he had, after his usual habit, shaken off the sedentary attitude and prepared himself for sleep by a fierce preliminary gallop in the woods. Besides, he had been a large winner, and on those occasions he generally isolated himself from his companions to avoid foolish altercations with inexperienced players. Even in fighting Jack was fastidious, and did not like to have his stomach for a real difficulty distended and vitiated by small preliminary indulgences.

He was just emerging from the wood into the highroad when a buggy dashed past him, containing a man and a woman. The woman wore a thick veil; the man was almost undistinguishable from dust. The glimpse was momentary, but dislike has a

keen eye, and in that glimpse Mr. Hamlin recognized Van Loo. The situation was equally clear. The bent heads and averted faces, the dust collected in the heedlessness of haste, the early hour, — indicating a night-long flight, — all made it plain to him that Van Loo was running away with some woman. Mr. Hamlin had no moral scruples, but he had the ethics of a sportsman, which he knew Mr. Van Loo was not. Whether the woman was an innocent schoolgirl or an actress, he was satisfied that Van Loo was doing a mean thing meanly. Mr. Hamlin also had a taste for mischief, and whether the woman was or was not fair game, he knew that for *his* purposes Van Loo was. With the greatest cheerfulness in the world he wheeled his horse and cantered after them.

They were evidently making for the Divide and a fresh horse, or to take the coach due an hour later. It was Mr. Hamlin's present object to circumvent this, and, therefore, it was quite in his way to return. Incidentally, however, the superior speed of his horse gave him the opportunity of frequently lunging towards them at a furious

pace, which had the effect of frantically increasing their own speed, when he would pull up with a silent laugh before he was fairly discovered, and allow the sound of his rapid horse's hoofs to die out. In this way he amused himself until the straggling town of the Divide came in sight, when, putting his spurs to his horse again, he managed, under pretense of the animal becoming ungovernable, to twice "cross the bows" of the fugitives, compelling them to slacken speed. At the second of these passages Van Loo apparently lost prudence, and slashing out with his whip, the lash caught slightly on the counter of Hamlin's horse. Mr. Hamlin instantly acknowledged it by lifting his hat gravely, and speeded on to the hotel, arriving at the steps and throwing himself from the saddle exactly as the buggy drove up. With characteristic audacity, he actually assisted the frightened and eager woman to alight and run into the hotel. But in this action her veil was accidentally lifted. Mr. Hamlin instantly recognized the pretty woman who had been pointed out to him in San Francisco as Mrs. Barker, the wife of one of the partners whose fortunes had in-

terested him five years ago. It struck him that this was an additional reason for his interference on Barker's account, although personally he could not conceive why a man should ever try to prevent a woman from running away from him. But then Mr. Hamlin's personal experiences had been quite the other way.

It was enough, however, to cause him to lay his hand lightly on Van Loo's arm as the latter, leaping down, was about to follow Mrs. Barker into the hotel. "You'll have time enough now," said Hamlin.

"Time for what?" said Van Loo savagely.

"Time to apologize for having cut my horse with your whip," said Jack sweetly. "We don't want to quarrel before a woman."

"I've no time for fooling!" said Van Loo, endeavoring to pass.

But Jack's hand had slipped to Van Loo's wrist, although he still smiled cheerfully. "Ah! Then you *did* mean it, and you propose to give me satisfaction?"

Van Loo paled slightly; he knew Jack's reputation as a duelist. But he was des-

perate. "You see my position," he said hurriedly. "I'm in a hurry; I have a lady with me. No man of honor" —

"You do me wrong," interrupted Jack, with a pained expression, — "you do, indeed. You are in a hurry — well, I have plenty of time. If you cannot attend to me now, why I will be glad to accompany you and the lady to the next station. Of course," he added, with a smile, "at a proper distance, and without interfering with the lady, whom I am pleased to recognize as the wife of an old friend. It would be more sociable, perhaps, if we had some general conversation on the road; it would prevent her being alarmed. I might even be of some use to *you*. If we are overtaken by her husband on the road, for instance, I should certainly claim the right to have the first shot at you. Boy!" he called to the hostler, "just sponge out Pancho's mouth, will you, to be ready when the buggy goes?" And, loosening his grip of Van Loo's wrist, he turned away as the other quickly entered the hotel.

But Mr. Van Loo did not immediately seek Mrs. Barker. He had already some

experience of that lady's nerves and irascibility on the drive, and had begun to see his error in taking so dangerous an impediment to his flight from the country. And another idea had come to him. He had already effected his purpose of compromising her with him in that flight, but it was still known only to few. If he left her behind for the foolish, doting husband, would not that devoted man take her back to avoid a scandal, and even forbear to pursue *him* for his financial irregularities? What were twenty thousand dollars of Mrs. Barker's money to the scandal of Mrs. Barker's elopement? Again, the failure to realize the forgery had left him safe, and Barker was sufficiently potent with the bank and Demorest to hush up that also. Hamlin was now the only obstacle to his flight; but even he would scarcely pursue *him* if Mrs. Barker were left behind. And it would be easier to elude him if he did.

In his preoccupation Van Loo did not see that he had entered the bar-room, but, finding himself there, he moved towards the bar; a glass of spirits would revive him. As he drank it he saw that the room was

full of rough men, apparently miners or packers — some of them Mexican, with here and there a Kanaka or Australian. Two men more ostentatiously clad, though apparently on equal terms with the others, were standing in the corner with their backs towards him. From the general silence as he entered he imagined that he had been the subject of conversation, and that his altercation with Hamlin had been overheard. Suddenly one of the two men turned and approached him. To his consternation he recognized Steptoe, — Steptoe, whom he had not seen for five years until last night, when he had avoided him in the courtyard of the Boomville Hotel. His first instinct was to retreat, but it was too late. And the spirits had warmed him into temporary recklessness.

“You ain’t goin’ to be backed down by a short-card gambler, are yer?” said Steptoe, with coarse familiarity.

“I have a lady with me, and am pressed for time,” said Van Loo quickly. “He knows it, otherwise he would not have dared” —

“Well, look here,” said Steptoe roughly.

“I ain’t particularly sweet on you, as you know; but I and these gentlemen,” he added, glancing around the room, “ain’t particularly sweet on Mr. Jack Hamlin neither, and we kalkilate to stand by you if you say so. Now, I reckon you want to get away with the woman, and the quicker the better, as you’re afraid there’ll be somebody after you afore long. That’s the way it pans out, don’t it? Well, when you’re ready to go, and you just tip us the wink, we’ll get in a circle round Jack and cover him, and if he starts after you we’ll send him on a little longer journey!—eh, boys?”

The men muttered their approval, and one or two drew their revolvers from their belts. Van Loo’s heart, which had leaped at first at this proposal of help, sank at this failure of his little plan of abandoning Mrs. Barker. He hesitated, and then stammered, “Thank you! Haste is everything with us now; but I should n’t mind leaving the lady among *chivalrous gentlemen* like yourselves for a few hours only, until I could communicate with my friends and return to properly chastise this scoundrel.”

Steptoe drew in his breath with a slight

whistle, and gazed at Van Loo. He instantly understood him. But the plea did not suit Steptoe, who, for purposes of his own, wished to put Mrs. Barker beyond her husband's possible reach. He smiled grimly. "I think you'd better take the woman with you," he said. "I don't think," he added in a lower voice, "that the boys would like your leaving her. They're very high-toned, they are!" he concluded ironically.

"Then," said Van Loo, with another desperate idea, "could you not let us have saddle-horses instead of the buggy? We could travel faster, and in the event of pursuit and anything happening to *me*," he added loftily, "*she* at least could escape her pursuer's vengeance."

This suited Steptoe equally well, as long as the guilty couple fled *together*, and in the presence of witnesses. But he was not deceived by Van Loo's heroic suggestion of self-sacrifice. "Quite right," he said sarcastically, "it shall be done, and I've no doubt *one* of you will escape. I'll send the horses round to the back door and keep the buggy in front. That will keep Jack there, *too*, — with the boys handy."

But Mr. Hamlin had quite as accurate an idea of Mr. Van Loo's methods and of his *own* standing with Steptoe's gang of roughs as Mr. Steptoe himself. More than that, he also had a hold on a smaller but more devoted and loyal following than Steptoe's. The employees and hostlers of the hotel worshiped him. A single word of inquiry revealed to him the fact that the buggy was *not* going on, but that Mr. Van Loo and Mrs. Barker *were* — on two horses, a temporary side-saddle having been constructed out of a mule's pack-tree. At which Mr. Hamlin, with his usual audacity, walked into the bar-room, and going to the bar leaned carelessly against it. Then turning to the lowering faces around him, he said, with a flash of his white teeth, "Well, boys, I'm calculating to leave the Divide in a few minutes to follow some friends in the buggy, and it seems to me only the square thing to stand the liquor for the crowd, without prejudice to any feeling or roughness there may be against me. Everybody who knows me knows that I'm generally there when the band plays, and I'm pretty sure to turn up for *that* sort of thing. So you'll just con-

sider that I've had a good game on the Divide, and I'm reckoning it's only fair to leave a little of it behind me here, to 'sweeten the pot' until I call again. I only ask you, gentlemen, to drink success to my friends in the buggy as early and as often as you can." He flung two gold pieces on the counter and paused, smiling.

He was right in his conjecture. Even the men who would have willingly "held him up" a moment after, at the bidding of Steptoe, saw no reason for declining a free drink "without prejudice." And it was a part of the irony of the situation that Steptoe and Van Loo were also obliged to participate to keep in with their partisans. It was, however, an opportune diversion to Van Loo, who managed to get nearer the door leading to the back entrance of the hotel, and to Mr. Jack Hamlin, who was watching him, as the men closed up to the bar.

The toast was drunk with acclamation, followed by another and yet another. Steptoe and Van Loo, who had kept their heads cool, were both wondering if Hamlin's intention were to intoxicate and incapacitate the crowd at the crucial moment, and Steptoe

smiled grimly over his superior knowledge of their alcoholic capacity. But suddenly there was the greater diversion of a shout from the road, the on-coming of a cloud of red dust, and the halt of another vehicle before the door. This time it was no jaded single horse and dust-stained buggy, but a double team of four spirited trotters, whose coats were scarcely turned with foam, before a light station wagon containing a single man. But that man was instantly recognized by every one of the outside loungers and stable-boys as well as the staring crowd within the saloon. It was James Stacy, the millionaire and banker. No one but himself knew that he had covered half the distance of a night-long ride from Boomville in two hours. But before they could voice their astonishment Stacy had thrown a letter to the obsequious landlord, and then gathering up the reins had sped away to the railroad station half a mile distant.

"Looks as if the Boss of Creation was in a hurry," said one of the eager gazers in the doorway. "Somebody goin' to get smashed, sure."

"More like as if he was just humpin'

himself to keep from getting smashed," said Steptoe. "The bank has n't got over the effect of their smart deal in the Wheat Trust. Everything they had in their hands tumbled yesterday in Sacramento. Men like me and you ain't goin' to trust their money to be 'jockeyed' with in that style. Nobody but a man with a swelled head like Stacy would have even dared to try it on. And now, by G—d! he's got to pay for it."

The harsh, exultant tone of the speaker showed that he had quite forgotten Van Loo and Hamlin in his superior hatred of the millionaire, and both men noticed it. Van Loo edged still nearer to the door, as Steptoe continued, "Ever since he made that big strike on Heavy Tree five years ago, the country has n't been big enough to hold him. But mark my words, gentlemen, the time ain't far off when he'll find a two-foot ditch again and a pick and grub wages room enough and to spare for him and his kind of cattle."

"You're not drinking," said Jack Hamlin cheerfully.

Steptoe turned towards the bar, and then

started. "Where's Van Loo?" he demanded of Jack sharply.

Jack jerked his thumb over his shoulder. "Gone to hurry up his girl, I reckon. I calculate he ain't got much time to fool away here."

Steptoe glanced suspiciously at Jack. But at the same moment they were all startled — even Jack himself — at the apparition of Mrs. Barker passing hurriedly along the veranda before the windows in the direction of the still waiting buggy. "D—n it!" said Steptoe in a fierce whisper to the man next him. "Tell her not *there* — at the back door!" But before the messenger reached the door there was a sudden rattle of wheels, and with one accord all except Hamlin rushed to the veranda, only to see Mrs. Barker driving rapidly away alone. Steptoe turned back into the room, but Jack also had disappeared.

For in the confusion created at the sight of Mrs. Barker, he had slipped to the back door and found, as he suspected, only one horse, and that with a side-saddle on. His intuitions were right. Van Loo, when he disappeared from the saloon, had instantly

fled, taking the other horse and abandoning the woman to her fate. Jack as instantly leaped upon the remaining saddle and dashed after him. Presently he caught a glimpse of the fugitive in the distance, heard the half-angry, half-ironical shouts of the crowd at the back door, and as he reached the hill-top saw, with a mingling of satisfaction and perplexity, Mrs. Barker on the other road, still driving frantically in the direction of the railroad station. At which Mr. Hamlin halted, threw away his encumbering saddle, and, good rider that he was, remounted the horse, barebacked but for his blanket-pad, and thrusting his knees in the loose girths, again dashed forwards, — with such good results that, as Van Loo galloped up to the stagecoach office, at the next station, and was about to enter the waiting coach for Marysville, the soft hand of Mr. Hamlin was laid on his shoulder.

“I told you,” said Jack blandly, “that I had plenty of time. I would have been here *before* and even overtaken you, only you had the better horse and the only saddle.”

Van Loo recoiled. But he was now desperate and reckless. Beckoning Jack out

of earshot of the other passengers, he said with tightened lips, "Why do you follow me? What is your purpose in coming here?"

"I thought," said Hamlin dryly, "that I was to have the pleasure of getting satisfaction from you for the insult you gave me."

"Well, and if I apologize for it, what then?" he said quickly.

Hamlin looked at him quietly. "Well, I think I also said something about the lady being the wife of a friend of mine."

"And I have left her *behind*. Her husband can take her back without disgrace, for no one knows of her flight but you and me. Do you think your shooting me will save her? It will spread the scandal far and wide. For I warn you, that as I have apologized for what you choose to call my personal insult, unless you murder me in cold blood without witness, I shall let them know the *reason* of your quarrel. And I can tell you more: if you only succeed in *stopping* me here, and make me lose my chance of getting away, the scandal to your friend will be greater still."

Mr. Hamlin looked at Van Loo curiously. There was a certain amount of conviction in

what he said. He had never met this kind of creature before. He had surpassed even Hamlin's first intuition of his character. He amused and interested him. But Mr. Hamlin was also a man of the world, and knew that Van Loo's reasoning might be good. He put his hands in his pockets, and said gravely, "What *is* your little game?"

Van Loo had been seized with another inspiration of desperation. Steptoe had been partly responsible for this situation. Van Loo knew that Jack and Steptoe were not friends. He had certain secrets of Steptoe's that might be of importance to Jack. Why should he not try to make friends with this powerful free-lance and half-outlaw?

"It's a game," he said significantly, "that might be of interest to your friends to hear."

Hamlin took his hands out of his pockets, turned on his heel, and said, "Come with me."

"But I must go by that coach now," said Van Loo desperately, "or — I've told you what would happen."

"Come with me," said Jack coolly. "If I'm satisfied with what you tell me, I'll put

you down at the next station an hour before that coach gets there."

"You swear it?" said Van Loo hesitatingly.

"I've *said* it," returned Jack. "Come!" and Van Loo followed Mr. Hamlin into the station hotel.

CHAPTER VI.

THE abrupt disappearance of Jack Hamlin and the strange lady and gentleman visitor was scarcely noticed by the other guests of the Divide House, and beyond the circle of Steptoe and his friends, who were a distinct party and strangers to the town, there was no excitement. Indeed, the hotel proprietor might have confounded them together, and, perhaps, Van Loo was not far wrong in his belief that their identity had not been suspected. Nor were Steptoe's followers very much concerned in an episode in which they had taken part only at the suggestion of their leader, and which had terminated so tamely. That they would have liked a "row," in which Jack Hamlin would have been incidentally forced to disgorge his winnings, there was no doubt, but that their interference was asked solely to gratify some personal spite of Steptoe's against Van Loo was equally plain to them.

There was some grumbling and outspoken criticism of his methods.

This was later made more obvious by the arrival of another guest for whom Steptoe and his party were evidently waiting. He was a short, stout man, whose heavy red beard was trimmed a little more carefully than when he was first known to Steptoe as Alky Hall, the drunkard of Heavy Tree Hill. His dress, too, exhibited a marked improvement in quality and style, although still characterized in the waist and chest by the unbuttoned freedom of portly and slovenly middle age. Civilization had restricted his potations or limited them to certain festivals known as "sprees," and his face was less puffy and sodden. But with the accession of sobriety he had lost his good humor, and had the irritability and intolerance of virtuous restraint.

"Ye need n't ladle out any of your forty-rod whiskey to me," he said querulously to Steptoe, as he filed out with the rest of the party through the bar-room into the adjacent apartment. "I want to keep my head level till our business is over, and I reckon it would n't hurt you and your gang to do the

same. They're less likely to blab; and there are few doors that whiskey won't unlock," he added, as Steptoe turned the key in the door after the party had entered.

The room had evidently been used for meetings of directors or political caucuses, and was roughly furnished with notched and whittled armchairs and a single long deal table, on which were ink and pens. The men sat down around it with a half-embarrassed, half-contemptuous attitude of formality, their bent brows and isolated looks showing little community of sentiment and scarcely an attempt to veil that individual selfishness that was prominent. Still less was there any essay of companionship or sympathy in the manner of Steptoe as he suddenly rapped on the table with his knuckles.

"Gentlemen," he said, with a certain deliberation of utterance, as if he enjoyed his own coarse directness, "I reckon you all have a sort of general idea what you were picked up for, or you would n't be here. But you may or may not know that for the present you are honest, hard-working miners, — the backbone of the State of Californy,

— and that you have formed yourselves into a company called the ‘Blue Jay,’ and you’ve settled yourselves on the Bar below Heavy Tree Hill, on a deserted claim of the Marshall Brothers, not half a mile from where the big strike was made five years ago. That’s what you *are*, gentlemen; that’s what you’ll continue *to be* until the job’s finished; and,” he added, with a sudden dominance that they all felt, “the man who forgets it will have to reckon with me. Now,” he continued, resuming his former ironical manner, “now, what are the cold facts of the case? The Marshalls worked this claim ever since ’49, and never got anything out of it; then they dropped off or died out, leaving only one brother, Tom Marshall, to work what was left of it. Well, a few days ago *he* found indications of a big lead in the rock, and instead of rushin’ out and yellin’ like an honest man, and callin’ in the boys to drink, he sneaks off to ‘Frisco, and goes to the bank to get ‘em to take a hand in it. Well, you know, when Jim Stacy takes a hand in anything, *it’s both hands*, and the bank would n’t see it until he promised to guarantee possession of the

whole abandoned claim, — ‘dips, spurs, and angles,’ — and let them work the whole thing, which the d—d fool *did*, and the bank agreed to send an expert down there to-morrow to report. But while he was away some one on our side, who was an expert also, got wind of it, and made an examination all by himself, and found it was a vein sure enough and a big thing, and some one else on our side found out, too, all that Marshall had promised the bank and what the bank had promised him. Now, gentlemen, when the bank sends down that expert to-morrow I expect that he will find *you in possession* of every part of the deserted claim except the spot where Tom is still working.”

“And what good is that to us?” asked one of the men contemptuously.

“Good?” repeated Steptoe harshly. “Well, if you’re not as d—d a fool as Marshall, you’ll see that if he has struck a lead or vein it’s bound to run across *our claims*, and what’s to keep us from sinking for it as long as Marshall has n’t worked the other claims for years nor preëmpted them for this lead?”

“What ’ll keep him from preëmpting now?”

“Our possession.”

“But if he can prove that the brothers left their claims to him to keep, he ’ll just send the sheriff and his posse down upon us,” persisted the first speaker.

“It will take him three months to do that by law, and the sheriff and his posse can’t do it before as long as we ’re in peaceable possession of it. And by the time that expert and Marshall return they ’ll find us in peaceful possession, unless we ’re such blasted fools as to stay talking about it here!”

“But what’s to prevent Marshall from getting a gang of his own to drive us off?”

“Now your talkin’ and not yelpin’,” said Steptoe, with slow insolence. “D—d if I didn’t begin to think you kalkilated I was goin’ to employ you as lawyers! Nothing is to prevent him from gettin’ up *his* gang, and we hope he ’ll do it, for you see it puts us both on the same level before the law, for we ’re both *breakin’ it*. And we kalkilate that we ’re as good as any roughs they can pick up at Heavy Tree.”

“I reckon!” “Ye can count us in!” said half a dozen voices eagerly.

“But what’s the job goin’ to pay us?” persisted a Sydney man. “An’ arter we’ve beat off this other gang, are we going to scrub along on grub wages until we’re yanked out by process-sarvers three months later? If that’s the ticket I’m not in it. I are n’t no b—y quartz miner.”

“We ain’t going to do no more *mining* there than the bank,” said Steptoe fiercely. “And the bank ain’t going to wait no three months for the end of the lawsuit. They’ll float the stock of that mine for a couple of millions, and get out of it with a million before a month. And they’ll have to buy us off to do that. What they’ll pay will depend upon the lead; but we don’t move off those claims for less than five thousand dollars, which will be two hundred and fifty dollars to each man. But,” said Steptoe in a lower but perfectly distinct voice, “if there should be a row, — and they *begin* it, — and in the scuffle Tom Marshall, their only witness, should happen to get in the way of a revolver or have his head caved in, there might be some difficulty in their hold-

in' *any of the mine* against honest, hard-working miners in possession. You hear me?"

There was a breathless silence for the moment, and a slight movement of the men in their chairs, but never in fear or protest. Every one had heard the speaker distinctly, and every man distinctly understood him. Some of them were criminals, one or two had already the stain of blood on their hands; but even the most timid, who at other times might have shrunk from suggested assassination, saw in the speaker's words only the fair removal of a natural enemy.

"All right, boys. I'm ready to wade in at once. Why ain't we on the road now? We might have been but for foolin' our time away on that man Van Loo."

"Van Loo!" repeated Hall eagerly, —
"Van Loo! Was he here?"

"Yes," said Steptoe shortly, administering a kick under the table to Hall, as he had no wish to revive the previous irritability of his comrades. "He's gone, but," turning to the others, "you'd have had to wait for Mr. Hall's arrival, anyhow. And

now you've got your order you can start. Go in two parties by different roads, and meet on the other side of the hotel at Hy-mettus. I'll be there before you. Pick up some shovels and drills as you go; remember you're honest miners, but don't forget your shootin'-irons for all that. Now scatter."

It was well that they did, vacating the room more cheerfully and sympathetically than they had entered it, or Hall's manifest disturbance over Van Loo's visit would have been noticed. When the last man had disappeared Hall turned quickly to Steptoe. "Well, what did he say? Where has he gone?"

"Don't know," said Steptoe, with uneasy curtness. "He was running away with a woman — well, Mrs. Barker, if you want to know," he added, with rising anger, "the wife of one of those cursed partners. Jack Hamlin was here, and was jockeying to stop him, and interfered. But what the devil has that job to do with our job?" He was losing his temper; everything seemed to turn upon this infernal Van Loo!

"He was n't running away with Mrs.

Barker," gasped Hall, — "it was with her *money!* and the fear of being connected with the Wheat Trust swindle which he organized, and with our money which I lent him for the same purpose. And he knows all about that job, for I wanted to get him to go into it with us. Your name and mine ain't any too sweet-smelling for the bank, and we ought to have a middleman who knows business to arrange with them. The bank dare n't object to him, for they've employed him in even shadier transactions than this when *they* did n't wish to appear. *I* knew he was in difficulties along with Mrs. Barker's speculations, but I never thought him up to this. And," he added, with sudden desperation, "*you* trusted him, too."

In an instant Steptoe caught the frightened man by the shoulders and was bearing him down on the table. "Are you a traitor, a liar, or a besotted fool?" he said hoarsely. "Speak. *When* and *where* did I trust him?"

"You said in your note — I was — to — help him," gasped Hall.

"My note," repeated Steptoe, releasing Hall with astonished eyes.

“Yes,” said Hall, tremblingly searching in his vest pocket. “I brought it with me. It is n’t much of a note, but there’s your signature plain enough.”

He handed Steptoe a torn piece of paper folded in a three-cornered shape. Steptoe opened it. He instantly recognized the paper on which he had written his name and sent up to his wife at the Boomville Hotel. But, added to it, in apparently the same hand, in smaller characters, were the words, “Help Van Loo all you can.”

The blood rushed into his face. But he quickly collected himself, and said hurriedly, “All right, I had forgotten it. Let the d—d sneak go. We’ve got what’s a thousand times better in this claim at Marshall’s, and it’s well that he is n’t in it to scoop the lion’s share. Only we must not waste time getting there now. You go there first, and at once, and set those rascals to work. I’ll follow you before Marshall comes up. Get; I’ll settle up here.”

His face darkened once more as Hall hurried away, leaving him alone. He drew out the piece of paper from his pocket and stared at it again. Yes; it was the one he had

sent to his wife. How did Van Loo get hold of it? Was he at the hotel that night? Had he picked it up in the hall or passage when the servant dropped it? When Hall handed him the paper and he first recognized it a fiendish thought, followed by a spasm of more fiendish rage, had sent the blood to his face. But his crude common sense quickly dismissed that suggestion of his wife's complicity with Van Loo. But had she seen him passing through the hotel that night, and had sought to draw from him some knowledge of his early intercourse with the child, and confessed everything, and even produced the paper with his signature as a proof of identity? Women had been known to do such desperate things. Perhaps she disbelieved her son's aversion to her, and was trying to sound Van Loo. As for the forged words by Van Loo, and the use he had put them to, he cared little. He believed the man was capable of forgery; indeed, he suddenly remembered that in the old days his son had spoken innocently, but admirably, of Van Loo's wonderful chirographical powers and his faculty of imitating the writings of others, and how he had even

offered to teach him. A new and exasperating thought came into his feverish consciousness. What if Van Loo, in teaching the boy, had even made use of him as an innocent accomplice to cover up his own tricks! The suggestion was no question of moral ethics to Steptoe, nor of his son's possible contamination, although since the night of the big strike he had held different views; it was simply a fierce, selfish jealousy that *another* might have profited by the lad's helplessness and inexperience. He had been tormented by this jealousy before in his son's liking for Van Loo. He had at first encouraged his admiration and imitative regard for this smooth swindler's graces and accomplishments, which, though he scorned them himself, he was, after the common parental infatuation, willing that the boy should profit by. Incapable, through his own consciousness, of distinguishing between Van Loo's superficial polish and the true breeding of a gentleman, he had only looked upon it as an equipment for his son which might be serviceable to himself. He had told his wife the truth when he informed her of Van Loo's fears of being reminded of their for-

mer intimacy; but he had not told her how its discontinuance after they had left Heavy Tree Hill had affected her son, and how he still cherished his old admiration for that specious rascal. Nor had he told her how this had stung him, through his own selfish greed of the boy's affection. Yet now that it was possible that she had met Van Loo that evening, she might have become aware of Van Loo's power over her child. How she would exult, for all her pretended hatred of Van Loo! How, perhaps, they had plotted together! How Van Loo might have become aware of the place where his son was kept, and have been bribed by the mother to tell her! He stopped in a whirl of giddy fancies. His strong common sense in all other things had been hitherto proof against such idle dreams or suggestions; but the very strength of his parental love and jealousy had awakened in him at last the terrors of imagination.

His first impulse had been to seek his wife, regardless of discovery or consequences, at Hymettus, where she had said she was going. It was on his way to the rendezvous at Marshall's claim. But this he as instantly

set aside. It was his *son* he must find ; *she* might not confess, or might deceive him — the boy would not ; and if his fears were correct, she could be arraigned afterwards. It was possible for him to reach the little Mission church and school, secluded in a remote valley by the old Franciscan fathers, where he had placed the boy for the last few years unknown to his wife. It would be a long ride, but he could still reach Heavy Tree Hill afterwards before Marshall and the expert arrived. And he had a feeling he had never felt before on the eve of a desperate adventure, — that he must see the boy first. He remembered how the child had often accompanied him in his flight, and how he had gained strength, and, it seemed to him, a kind of luck, from the touch of that small hand in his. Surely it was necessary now that at least his mind should be at rest regarding *him* on the eve of an affair of this moment. Perhaps he might never see him again. At any other time, and under the influence of any other emotion, he would have scorned such a sentimentalism — he who had never troubled himself either with preparation for the future or consideration for

the past. But at that moment he felt both. He drew a long breath. He could catch the next train to the Three Boulders and ride thence to San Felipe. He hurriedly left the room, settled with the landlord, and galloped to the station. By the irony of circumstances the only horse available for that purpose was Mr. Hamlin's own.

By two o'clock he was at the Three Boulders, where he got a fast horse and galloped into San Felipe by four. As he descended the last slope through the fastnesses of pines towards the little valley overlooked in its remoteness and purely pastoral simplicity by the gold-seeking immigrants, — its seclusion as one of the furthest northern Californian missions still preserved through its insignificance and the efforts of the remaining Brotherhood, who used it as an infirmary and a school for the few remaining Spanish families, — he remembered how he once blundered upon it with the boy while hotly pursued by a hue and cry from one of the larger towns, and how he found sanctuary there. He remembered how, when the pursuit was over, he had placed the boy there under the padre's charge. He had

lied to his wife regarding the whereabouts of her son, but he had spoken truly regarding his free expenditure for the boy's maintenance, and the good fathers had accepted, equally for the child's sake as for the Church's sake, the generous "restitution" which this coarse, powerful, ruffianly looking father was apparently seeking to make. He was quite aware of it at the time, and had equally accepted it with grim cynicism; but it now came back to him with a new and smarting significance. Might *they*, too, not succeed in weaning the boy's affection from him, or if the mother had interfered, would they not side with her in claiming an equal right? He had sometimes laughed to himself over the security of this hiding-place, so unknown and so unlikely to be discovered by her, yet within easy reach of her friends and his enemies; he now ground his teeth over the mistake which his doting desire to keep his son accessible to him had caused him to make. He put spurs to his horse, dashed down the little, narrow, ill-paved street, through the deserted plaza, and pulled up in a cloud of dust before the only remaining tower, with its cracked belfry, of

the half-ruined Mission church. A new dormitory and school-building had been extended from its walls, but in a subdued, harmonious, modest way, quite unlike the usual glaring white-pine glories of provincial towns. Steptoe laughed to himself bitterly. Some of his money had gone in it.

He seized the horsehair rope dangling from a bell by the wall and rang it sharply. A soft-footed priest appeared, — Father Dominico. “Eddy Horncastle? Ah! yes. Eddy, dear child, is gone.”

“Gone!” shouted Steptoe in a voice that startled the padre. “Where? When? With whom?”

“Pardon, señor, but for a time — only a pasear to the next village. It is his saint’s day — he has half-holiday. He is a good boy. It is a little pleasure for him and for us.”

“Oh!” said Steptoe, softened into a rough apology. “I forgot. All right. Has he had any visitors lately — lady, for instance?”

Father Dominico cast a look half of fright, half of reproof upon his guest.

“A lady *here!*”

In his relief Steptoe burst into a coarse laugh. "Of course; you see I forgot that, too. I was thinking of one of his woman folks, you know — relatives — aunts. Was there any other visitor?"

"Only one. Ah! we know the señor's rules regarding his son."

"One?" repeated Steptoe. "Who was it?"

"Oh, quite an hidalgo — an old friend of the child's — most polite, most accomplished, fluent in Spanish, perfect in deportment. The Señor Horncastle surely could find nothing to object to. Father Pedro was charmed with him. A man of affairs, and yet a good Catholic, too. It was a Señor Van Loo — Don Paul the boy called him, and they talked of the boy's studies in the old days as if — indeed, but for the stranger being a caballero and man of the world — as if he had been his teacher."

It was a proof of the intensity of the father's feelings that they had passed beyond the power of his usual coarse, brutal expression, and he only stared at the priest with a dull red face in which the blood seemed to have stagnated. Presently he said thickly, "When did he come?"

“A few days ago.”

“Which way did Eddy go?”

“To Brown’s Mills, scarcely a league away. He will be here — even now — on the instant. But the señor will come into the refectory and take some of the old Mission wine from the Catalan grape, planted one hundred and fifty years ago, until the dear child returns. He will be so happy.”

“No! I’m in a hurry. I will go on and meet him.” He took off his hat, mopped his crisp, wet hair with his handkerchief, and in a thick, slow, impeded voice, more suggestive than the outburst he restrained, said, “And as long as my son remains here that man, Van Loo, must not pass this gate, speak to him, or even see him. You hear me? See to it, you and all the others. See to it, I say, or” — He stopped abruptly, clapped his hat on the swollen veins of his forehead, turned quickly, passed out without another word through the archway into the road, and before the good priest could cross himself or recover from his astonishment the thud of his horse’s hoofs came from the dusty road.

It was ten minutes before his face resumed

its usual color. But in that ten minutes, as if some of the struggle of his rider had passed into him, his horse was sweating with exhaustion and fear. For in that ten minutes, in this new imagination with which he was cursed, he had killed both Van Loo and his son, and burned the refectory over the heads of the treacherous priests. Then, quite himself again, a voice came to him from the rocky trail above the road with the hail of "Father!" He started quickly as a lad of fifteen or sixteen came bounding down the hillside, and ran towards him.

"You passed me and I called to you, but you did not seem to hear," said the boy breathlessly. "Then I ran after you. Have you been to the Mission?"

Steptoe looked at him quite as breathlessly, but from a deeper emotion. He was, even at first sight, a handsome lad, glowing with youth and the excitement of his run, and, as the father looked at him, he could see the likeness to his mother in his clear-cut features, and even a resemblance to himself in his square, compact chest and shoulders and crisp, black curls. A thrill of purely animal paternity passed over him,

the fierce joy of his flesh over his own flesh! His own son, by God! They could not take *that* from him; they might plot, swindle, fawn, cheat, lie, and steal away his affections, but there he was, plain to all eyes, his own son, his very son!

"Come here," he said in a singular, half-weary and half-protesting voice, which the boy instantly recognized as his father's accents of affection.

The boy hesitated as he stood on the edge of the road and pointed with mingled mischief and fastidiousness to the depths of impalpable red dust that lay between him and the horseman. Steptoe saw that he was very smartly attired in holiday guise, with white duck trousers and patent leather shoes, and, after the Spanish fashion, wore black kid gloves. He certainly was a bit of a dandy, as he had said. The father's whole face changed as he wheeled and came before the lad, who lifted up his arms expectantly. They had often ridden together on the same horse.

"No rides to-day in that toggery, Eddy," he said in the same voice. "But I'll get down and we'll go and sit somewhere under

a tree and have some talk. I've got a bit of a job that's hurrying me, and I can't waste time."

"Not one of your old jobs, father? I thought you had quite given that up?"

The boy spoke more carelessly than reproachfully, or even wonderingly; yet, as he dismounted and tethered his horse, Steptoe answered evasively, "It's a big thing, sonny; maybe we'll make our eternal fortune, and then we'll light out from this hole and have a gay time elsewhere. Come along."

He took the boy's gloved right hand in his own powerful grasp, and together they clambered up the steep hillside to a rocky ledge on which a fallen pine from above had crashed, snapped itself in twain, and then left its withered crown to hang half down the slope, while the other half rested on the ledge. On this they sat, looking down upon the road and the tethered horse. A gentle breeze moved the treetops above their heads, and the westering sun played hide-and-seek with the shifting shadows. The boy's face was quick and alert with all that moved round him, but without thought; the

father's face was heavy, except for the eyes that were fixed upon his son.

"Van Loo came to the Mission," he said suddenly.

The boy's eyes glittered quickly, like a steel that pierced the father's heart. "Oh," he said simply, "then it was the padre told you?"

"How did he know you were here?" asked Steptoe.

"I don't know," said the boy quietly. "I think he said something, but I've forgotten it. But it was mighty good of him to come, for I thought, you know, that he did not care to see me after Heavy Tree, and that he'd gone back on us."

"What did he tell you?" continued Steptoe. "Did he talk of me or of your mother?"

"No," said the boy, but without any show of interest or sympathy; "we talked mostly about old times."

"Tell *me* about those old times, Eddy. You never told me anything about them."

The boy, momentarily arrested more by something in the tone of his father's voice—a weakness he had never noticed before

—than by any suggestion of his words, said with a laugh, “Oh, only about what we used to do when I was very little and used to call myself his ‘little brother,’ — don’t you remember, long before the big strike on Heavy Tree? They were gay times we had then.”

“And how he used to teach you to imitate other people’s handwriting?” said Steptoe.

“What made you think of that, pop?” said the boy, with a slight wonder in his eyes. “Why, that’s the very thing we *did* talk about.”

“But you did n’t do it again; you ain’t done it since,” said Steptoe quickly.

“Lord! no,” said the boy contemptuously. “There ain’t no chance now, and there would n’t be any fun in it. It is n’t like the old times when him and me were all alone, and we used to write letters as coming from other people to all the boys round Heavy Tree and the Bar, and sometimes as far as Boomville, to get them to do things, and they ’d think the letters were real, and they ’d do ’em. And there ’d be the biggest kind of a row, and nobody ever knew who did it.”

Steptoe stared at this flesh of his own flesh half in relief, half in frightened admiration. Sitting astride the log, his elbows on his knees and his gloved hands supporting his round cheeks, the boy's handsome face became illuminated with an impish devilry which the father had never seen before. With dancing eyes he went on. "It was one of those very games we played so long ago that he wanted to see me about and wanted me to keep mum about, for some of the folks that he played it on were around here now. It was a game we got off on one of the big strike partners long before the strike. I'll tell *you*, dad, for you know what happened afterwards, and you'll be glad. Well, that partner — Demorest — was a kind of silly, you remember — a sort of Miss Nancyish fellow — always gloomy and lovesick after his girl in the States. Well, we'd written lots of letters to girls from their chaps before, and got lots of fun out of it; but we had even a better show for a game here, for it happened that Van Loo knew all about the girl — things that even the man's own partners did n't, for Van Loo's mother was a sort of a friend of the girl's

family, and traveled about with her, and knew that the girl was spoony over this Demorest, and that they corresponded. So, knowing that Van Loo was employed at Heavy Tree, she wrote to him to find out all about Demorest and how to stop their foolish nonsense, for the girl's parents did n't want her to marry a broken-down miner like him. So we thought we 'd do it our own way, and write a letter to her as if it was from him, don't you see? I wanted to make him call her awful names, and say that he hated her, that he was a murderer and a horse-thief, and that he had killed a policeman, and that he was thinking of becoming a Digger Injin, and having a Digger squaw for a wife, which he liked better than her. Lord! dad, you ought to have seen what stuff I made up." The boy burst into a shrill, half-feminine laugh, and Steptoe, catching the infection, laughed loudly in his own coarse, brutal fashion.

For some moments they sat there looking in each other's faces, shaking with sympathetic emotion, the father forgetting the purpose of his coming there, his rage over Van Loo's visit, and even the rendezvous to

which his horse in the road below was waiting to bring him ; the son forgetting their retreat from Heavy Tree Hill and his shameful vagabond wanderings with that father in the years that followed. The sinking sun stared blankly in their faces ; the protecting pines above them moved by a stronger gust shook a few cones upon them ; an enormous crow mockingly repeated the father's coarse laugh, and a squirrel scampered away from the strangely assorted pair as Steptoe, wiping his eyes and forehead with his pocket-handkerchief, said : —

“ And did you send it ? ”

“ Oh ! Van Loo thought it too strong. Said that those sort of love-sick fools made more fuss over little things than they did over big things, and he sort of toned it down, and fixed it up himself. But it told. For there were never any more letters in the post-office in her handwriting, and there was n't any posted to her in his.”

They both laughed again, and then Steptoe rose. “ I must be getting along,” he said, looking curiously at the boy. “ I've got to catch a train at Three Boulders Station.”

“Three Boulders!” repeated the boy. “I’m going there, too, on Friday, to meet Father Cipriano.”

“I reckon my work will be all done by Friday,” said Steptoe musingly. Standing thus, holding his boy’s hand, he was thinking that the real fight at Marshall’s would not take place at once, for it might take a day or two for Marshall to gather forces. But he only pressed his son’s hand gently.

“I wish you would sometimes take me with you as you used to,” said the boy curiously. “I’m bigger now, and would n’t be in your way.”

Steptoe looked at the boy with a choking sense of satisfaction and pride. But he said, “No;” and then suddenly with simulated humor, “Don’t you be taken in by any letters from *me*, such as you and Van Loo used to write. You hear?”

The boy laughed.

“And,” continued Steptoe, “if anybody says I sent for you, don’t you believe them.”

“No,” said the boy, smiling.

“And don’t you even believe I’m dead till you see me so. You understand. By the way, Father Pedro has some money of

mine kept for you. Now hurry back to school and say you met me, but that I was in a great hurry. I reckon I may have been rather rough to the priests."

They had reached the lower road again, and Steptoe silently unhitched his horse. "Good-by," he said, as he laid his hand on the boy's arm.

"Good-by, dad."

He mounted his horse slowly. "Well," he said smilingly, looking down the road, "you ain't got anything more to say to me, have you?"

"No, dad."

"Nothin' you want?"

"Nothin', dad."

"All right. Good-by."

He put spurs to his horse and cantered down the road without looking back. The boy watched him with idle curiosity until he disappeared from sight, and then went on his way, whistling and striking off the heads of the wayside weeds with his walking-stick.

CHAPTER VII.

THE sun arose so brightly over Hymettus on the morning after the meeting of the three partners that it was small wonder that Barker's impressionable nature quickly responded to it, and, without awakening the still sleeping child, he dressed hurriedly, and was the first to greet it in the keen air of the slope behind the hotel. To his pantheistic spirit it had always seemed as natural for him to early welcome his returning brothers of the woods and hills as to say good-morning to his fellow mortals. And, in the joy of seeing Black Spur rising again to his level in the distance before him, he doffed his hat to it with a return of his old boyish habit, laid his arm caressingly around the great girth of the nearest pine, clapped his hands to the scampering squirrels in his path, and whistled to the dipping jays. In this way he quite forgot the more serious affairs of the preceding night, or, rather, saw

them only in the gilding of the morning, until, looking up, he perceived the tall figure of Demorest approaching him; and then it struck him with his first glance at his old partner's face that his usual suave, gentle melancholy had been succeeded by a critical cynicism of look and a restrained bitterness of accent. Barker's loyal heart smote him for his own selfishness; Demorest had been hard hit by the discovery of the forgery and Stacy's concern in it, and had doubtless passed a restless night, while he (Barker) had forgotten all about it. "I thought of knocking at your door, as I passed," he said, with sympathetic apology, "but I was afraid I might disturb you. Is n't it glorious here? Quite like the old hill. Look at that lizard; he has n't moved since he first saw me. Do you remember the one who used to steal our sugar, and then stiffen himself into stone on the edge of the bowl until he looked like an ornamental handle to it?" he continued, rebounding again into spirits.

"Barker," said Demorest abruptly, "what sort of woman is this Mrs. Van Loo, whose rooms I occupy?"

"Oh," said Barker, with optimistic in-

nocence, "a most proper woman, old chap. White-haired, well-dressed, with a little foreign accent and a still more foreign courtesy. Why, you don't suppose we 'd" —

"But what is she like?" said Demorest impatiently.

"Well," said Barker thoughtfully, "she's the kind of woman who might be Van Loo's mother, I suppose."

"You mean the mother of a forger and a swindler?" asked Demorest sharply.

"There are no mothers of swindlers and forgers," said Barker gravely, "in the way you mean. It's only those poor devils," he said, pointing, nevertheless, with a certain admiration to a circling sparrow-hawk above him, "who have inherited instincts. What I mean is that she might be Van Loo's mother, because he did n't *select* her."

"Where did she come from? and how long has she been here?" asked Demorest.

"She came from abroad, I believe. And she came here just after you left. Van Loo, after he became secretary of the Ditch Company, sent for her and her daughter to keep house for him. But you'll see her to-day or to-morrow probably, when she returns. I'll

introduce you ; she 'll be rather glad to meet some one from abroad, and all the more if he happens to be rich and distinguished, and eligible for her daughter." He stopped suddenly in his smile, remembering Demorest's lifelong secret. But to his surprise his companion's face, instead of darkening as it was wont to do at any such allusion, brightened suddenly with a singular excitement as he answered dryly, " Ah well, if the girl is pretty, who knows ! "

Indeed, his spirits seemed to have returned with strange vivacity as they walked back to the hotel, and he asked many other questions regarding Mrs. Van Loo and her daughter, and particularly if the daughter had also been abroad. When they reached the veranda they found a few early risers eagerly reading the Sacramento papers, which had just arrived, or, in little knots, discussing the news. Indeed, they would probably have stopped Barker and his companion had not Barker, anxious to relieve his friend's curiosity, hurried with him at once to the manager's office.

" Can you tell me exactly when you expect Mrs. Van Loo to return ? " asked Barker quickly.

The manager with difficulty detached himself from the newspaper which he, too, was anxiously perusing, and said, with a peculiar smile, "Well no! she *was* to return to-day, but if you're wanting to keep her rooms, I should say there would n't be any trouble about it, as she'll hardly be coming back here *now*. She's rather high and mighty in style, I know, and a determined sort of critter, but I reckon she and her daughter would n't care much to be waltzing round in public after what has happened."

"I don't understand you," said Demorest impatiently. "What has happened?"

"Have n't you heard the news?" said the manager in surprise. "It's in all the Sacramento papers. Van Loo is a defaulter—has hypothecated everything he had and skedaddled."

Barker started. He was not thinking of the loss of his wife's money—only of *her* disappointment and mortification over it. Poor girl! Perhaps she was also worrying over his resentment,—as if she did not know him! He would go to her at once at Boomville. Then he remembered that she was coming with Mrs. Horncastle, and might be

already on her way here by rail or coach, and he would miss her. Demorest in the meantime had seized a paper, and was intently reading it.

“There’s bad news, too, for your friend, your old partner,” said the manager half sympathetically, half interrogatively. “There has been a drop out in everything the bank is carrying, and everybody is unloading. Two firms failed in ’Frisco yesterday that were carrying things for the bank, and have thrown everything back on it. There was an awful panic last night, and they say none of the big speculators know where they stand. Three of our best customers in the hotel rushed off to the bay this morning, but Stacy himself started before daylight, and got the through night express to stop for him on the Divide on signal. Shall I send any telegrams that may come to your room?”

Demorest knew that the manager suspected him of being interested in the bank, and understood the purport of the question. He answered, with calm surprise, that he was expecting no telegrams, and added, “But if Mrs. Van Loo returns I beg you

to at once let me know," and taking Barker's arm he went in to breakfast. Seated by themselves, Demorest looked at his companion. "I'm afraid, Barker boy, that this thing is more serious to Jim than we expected last night, or than he cared to tell us. And you, old man, I fear are hurt a little by Van Loo's flight. He had some money of your wife's, had n't he?"

Barker, who knew that the bulk of Demorest's fortune was in Stacy's hands, was touched at this proof of his unselfish thought, and answered with equal unselfishness that he was concerned only by the fear of Mrs. Barker's disappointment. "Why, Lord! Phil, whether she's lost or saved her money it's nothing to me. I gave it to her to do what she liked with it, but I'm afraid she'll be worrying over what *I* think of it, — as if she did not know me! And I'm half a mind, if it were not for missing her, to go over to Boomville, where she's stopping."

"I thought you said she was in San Francisco?" said Demorest abstractedly.

Barker colored. "Yes," he answered quickly. "But I've heard since that she stopped at Boomville on the way."

“Then don't let *me* keep you here,” returned Demorest. “For if Jim telegraphs to me I shall start for San Francisco at once, and I rather think he will. I did not like to say so before those panic-mongers outside who are stampeding everything; so run along, Barker boy, and ease your mind about the wife. We may have other things to think about soon.”

Thus adjured, Barker rose from his half-finished breakfast and slipped away. Yet he was not quite certain what to do. His wife must have heard the news at Boomville as quickly as he had, and, if so, would be on her way with Mrs. Horncastle; or she might be waiting for him — knowing, too, that he had heard the news — in fear and trembling. For it was Barker's custom to endow all those he cared for with his own sensitiveness, and it was not like him to reflect that the woman who had so recklessly speculated against his opinion would scarcely fear his reproaches in her defeat. In the fullness of his heart he telegraphed to her in case she had not yet left Boomville: “All right. Have heard news. Understand perfectly. Don't worry. Come to me.” Then

he left the hotel by the stable entrance in order to evade the guests who had congregated on the veranda, and made his way to a little wooded crest which he knew commanded a view of the two roads from Boomville. Here he determined to wait and intercept her before she reached the hotel. He knew that many of the guests were aware of his wife's speculations with Van Loo, and that he was her broker. He wished to spare her running the gauntlet of their curious stares and comments as she drove up alone. As he was climbing the slope the coach from Sacramento dashed past him on the road below, but he knew that it had changed horses at Boomville at four o'clock, and that his tired wife would not have availed herself of it at that hour, particularly as she could not have yet received the fateful news. He threw himself under a large pine, and watched the stage-coach disappear as it swept round into the courtyard of the hotel.

He sat there for some moments with his eyes bent upon the two forks of the red road that diverged below him, but which appeared to become whiter and more daz-

zling as he searched their distance. There was nothing to be seen except an occasional puff of dust which eventually revealed a horseman or a long trailing cloud out of which a solitary mule, one of a pack-train of six or eight, would momentarily emerge and be lost again. Then he suddenly heard his name called, and, looking up, saw Mrs. Horncastle, who had halted a few paces from him between two columns of the long-drawn aisle of pines.

In that mysterious half-light she seemed such a beautiful and goddess-like figure that his consciousness at first was unable to grasp anything else. She was always wonderfully well dressed, but the warmth and seclusion of this mountain morning had enabled her to wear a light gown of some delicate fabric which set off the grace of her figure, and even pardoned the rural coquetry of a silken sash around her still slender waist. An open white parasol thrown over her shoulder made a nimbus for her charming head and the thick coils of hair under her lace-edged hat. He had never seen her look so beautiful before. And that thought was so plainly in his frank face and eyes as he sprang to

his feet that it brought a slight rise of color to her own cheek.

“I saw you climbing up here as I passed in the coach a few minutes ago,” she said, with a smile, “and as soon as I had shaken the dust off I followed you.”

“Where’s Kitty?” he stammered.

The color faded from her face as it had come, and a shade of something like reproach crept into her dark eyes. And whatever it had been her purpose to say, or however carefully she might have prepared herself for this interview, she was evidently taken aback by the sudden directness of the inquiry. Barker saw this as quickly, and as quickly referred it to his own rudeness. His whole soul rushed in apology to his face as he said, “Oh, forgive me! I was anxious about Kitty; indeed, I had thought of coming again to Boomville, for you’ve heard the news, of course? Van Loo is a defaulter, and has run away with the poor child’s money.”

Mrs. Horncastle had heard the news at the hotel. She paused a moment to collect herself, and then said slowly and tentatively, with a watchful intensity in her eyes, “Mrs. Barker went, I think, to the Divide” —

But she was instantly interrupted by the eager Barker. "I see. I thought of that at once. She went directly to the company's offices to see if she could save anything from the wreck before she saw me. It was like her, poor girl! And you — you," he went on eagerly, his whole face beaming with gratitude, — "you, out of your goodness, came here to tell me." He held out both hands and took hers in his.

For a moment Mrs. Horncastle was speechless and vacillating. She had often noticed before that it was part of the irony of the creation of such a simple nature as Barker's that he was not only open to deceit, but absolutely seemed to invite it. Instead of making others franker, people were inclined to rebuke his credulity by restraint and equivocation on their own part. But the evasion thus offered to her, although only temporary, was a temptation she could not resist. And it prolonged an interview that a ruthless revelation of the truth might have shortened.

"She did not tell me she was going there," she replied still evasively; "and, indeed," she added, with a burst of candor

still more dangerous, "I only learned it from the hotel clerk after she was gone. But I want to talk to you about her relations to Van Loo," she said, with a return of her former intensity of gaze, "and I thought we would be less subject to interruption here than at the hotel. Only I suppose everybody knows this place, and any of those flirting couples are likely to come here. Besides," she added, with a little half-hysterical laugh and a slight shiver, as she looked up at the high interlacing boughs above her head, "it's as public as the aisles of a church, and really one feels as if one were 'speaking out' in meeting. Isn't there some other spot a little more secluded, where we could sit down," she went on, as she poked her parasol into the usual black gunpowdery deposit of earth which mingled with the carpet of pine-needles beneath her feet, "and not get all sticky and dirty?"

Barker's eyes sparkled. "I know every foot of this hill, Mrs. Horncastle," he said, "and if you will follow me I'll take you to one of the loveliest nooks you ever dreamed of. It's an old Indian spring now forgotten, and I think known only to me and

the birds. It's not more than ten minutes from here; only" — he hesitated as he caught sight of the smart French bronze buckled shoe and silken ankle which Mrs. Horncastle's gathering up of her dainty skirts around her had disclosed — "it may be a little rough and dusty going to your feet."

But Mrs. Horncastle pointed out that she had already irretrievably ruined her shoes and stockings in climbing up to him, — although Barker could really distinguish no diminution of their freshness, — and that she might as well go on. Whereat they both passed down the long aisle of slope to a little hollow of manzanita, which again opened to a view of Black Spur, but left the hotel hidden.

"What time did Kitty go?" began Barker eagerly, when they were half down the slope.

But here Mrs. Horncastle's foot slipped upon the glassy pine-needles, and not only stopped an answer, but obliged Barker to give all his attention to keep his companion from falling again until they reached the open. Then came the plunge through the

manzanita thicket, then a cool wade through waist-deep ferns, and then they emerged, holding each other's hand, breathless and panting before the spring.

It did not belie his enthusiastic description. A triangular hollow, niched in a shelf of the mountain-side, narrowed to a point from which the overflow of the spring percolated through a fringe of alder, to fall in what seemed from the valley to be a green furrow down the whole length of the mountain-side. Overhung by pines above, which met and mingled with the willows that everywhere fringed it, it made the one cooling shade in the whole basking expanse of the mountain, and yet was penetrated throughout by the intoxicating spice of the heated pines. Flowering reeds and long lush grasses drew a magic circle round an open bowl-like pool in the centre, that was always replenished to the slow murmur of an unseen rivulet that trickled from a white-quartz cavern in the mountain-side like a vein opened in its flank. Shadows of timid wings crossed it, quick rustlings disturbed the reeds, but nothing more. It was silent, but breathing; it was hidden to everything but the sky and the illimitable distance.

They threaded their way around it on the spongy carpet, covered by delicate lace-like vines that seemed to caress rather than trammel their moving feet, until they reached an open space before the pool. It was cushioned and matted with disintegrated pine bark, and here they sat down. Mrs. Horncastle furled her parasol and laid it aside; raised both hands to the back of her head and took two hat-pins out, which she placed in her smiling mouth; removed her hat, stuck the hat-pins in it, and handed it to Barker, who gently placed it on the top of a tall reed, where during the rest of that momentous meeting it swung and drooped like a flower; removed her gloves slowly; drank still smilingly and gratefully nearly a wineglassful of the water which Barker brought her in the green twisted chalice of a lily leaf; looked the picture of happiness, and then burst into tears.

Barker was astounded, dismayed, even terror-stricken. Mrs. Horncastle crying! Mrs. Horncastle, the imperious, the collected, the coldly critical, the cynical, smiling woman of the world, actually crying! Other women might cry — Kitty had cried often —

but Mrs. Horncastle! Yet, there she was, sobbing; actually sobbing like a schoolgirl, her beautiful shoulders rising and falling with her grief; crying unmistakably through her long white fingers, through a lace pocket-handkerchief which she had hurriedly produced and shaken from behind her like a conjurer's trick; her beautiful eyes a thousand times more lustrous for the sparkling beads that brimmed her lashes and welled over like the pool before her.

"Don't mind me," she murmured behind her handkerchief. "It's very foolish, I know. I was nervous — worried, I suppose; I'll be better in a moment. Don't notice me, please."

But Barker had drawn beside her and was trying, after the fashion of his sex, to take her handkerchief away in apparently the firm belief that this action would stop her tears. "But tell me what it is. Do Mrs. Horncastle, please," he pleaded in his boyish fashion. "Is it anything I can do? Only say the word; only tell me *something!*"

But he had succeeded in partially removing the handkerchief, and so caught a glimpse

of her wet eyes, in which a faint smile struggled out like sunshine through rain. But they clouded again, although she did n't cry, and her breath came and went with the action of a sob, and her hands still remained against her flushed face.

"I was only going to talk to you of Kitty" (sob) — "but I suppose I'm weak" (sob) — "and such a fool" (sob) "and I got to thinking of myself and my own sorrows when I ought to be thinking only of you and Kitty."

"Never mind Kitty," said Barker impulsively. "Tell me about yourself—your own sorrows. I am a brute to have bothered you about her at such a moment; and now until you have told me what is paining you so I shall not let you speak of her." He was perfectly sincere. What were Kitty's possible and easy tears over the loss of her money to the unknown agony that could wrench a sob from a woman like this? "Dear Mrs. Horncastle," he went on as breathlessly, "think of me now not as Kitty's husband, but as your true friend. Yes, as your *best* and *truest* friend, and speak to me as you would speak to him."

“You will be my friend?” she said suddenly and passionately, grasping his hand, “my best and truest friend? and if I tell you all, — everything, you will not cast me from you and hate me?”

Barker felt the same thrill from her warm hand slowly possess his whole being as it had the evening before, but this time he was prepared and answered the grasp and her eyes together as he said breathlessly, “I will be — I *am* your friend.”

She withdrew her hand and passed it over her eyes. After a moment she caught his hand again, and, holding it tightly as if she feared he might fly from her, bit her lip, and then slowly, without looking at him, said, “I lied to you about myself and Kitty that night; I did not come with her. I came alone and secretly to Boomville to see — to see the man who is my husband.”

“Your husband!” said Barker in surprise. He had believed, with the rest of the world, that there had been no communication between them for years. Yet so intense was his interest in her that he did not notice that this revelation was leaving now no excuse for his wife’s presence at Boomville.

Mrs. Horncastle went on with dogged bitterness, "Yes, my husband. I went to him to beg and bribe him to let me see my child. Yes, *my* child," she said frantically, tightening her hold upon his hand, "for I lied to you when I once told you I had none. I had a child, and, more than that, a child who at his birth I did not dare to openly claim."

She stopped breathlessly, stared at his face with her former intensity as if she would pluck the thought that followed from his brain. But he only moved closer to her, passed his arm over her shoulders with a movement so natural and protecting that it had a certain dignity in it, and, looking down upon her bent head with eyes brimming with sympathy, whispered, "Poor, poor child!"

Whereat Mrs. Horncastle again burst into tears. And then, with her head half drawn towards his shoulder, she told him all, — all that had passed between her and her husband, — even all that they had then but hinted at. It was as if she felt she could now, for the first time, voice all these terrible memories of the past which had come back to her last

night when her husband had left her. She concealed nothing, she veiled nothing ; there were intervals when her tears no longer flowed, and a cruel hardness and return of her old imperiousness of voice and manner took their place, as if she was doing a rigid penance and took a bitter satisfaction in laying bare her whole soul to him. "I never had a friend," she whispered ; "there were women who persecuted me with their jealous sneers ; there were men who persecuted me with their selfish affections. When I first saw *you*, you seemed something so apart and different from all other men that, although I scarcely knew you, I wanted to tell you, even then, all that I have told you now. I wanted you to be my friend ; something told me that you could,—that you could separate me from my past ; that you could tell me what to do ; that you could make me think as you thought, see life as *you* saw it, and trust always to some goodness in people as *you* did. And in this faith I thought that you would understand me now, and even forgive me all."

She made a slight movement as if to disengage his arm, and, possibly, to look into

his eyes, which she knew instinctively were bent upon her downcast head. But he only held her the more tightly until her cheek was close against his breast. "What could I do?" she murmured. "A man in sorrow and trouble may go to a woman for sympathy and support and the world will not gainsay or misunderstand him. But a woman — weaker, more helpless, credulous, ignorant, and craving for light — must not in her agony go to a man for succor and sympathy."

"Why should she not?" burst out Barker passionately, releasing her in his attempt to gaze into her face. "What man dare refuse her?"

"Not *that*," she said slowly, but with still averted eyes, "but because the world would say she *loved* him."

"And what should she care for the opinion of a world that stands aside and lets her suffer? Why should she heed its wretched babble?" he went on in flashing indignation.

"Because," she said faintly, lifting her moist eyes and moist and parted lips towards him, — "because it would be *true!*"

There was a silence so profound that even the spring seemed to withhold its song as their eyes and lips met. When the spring recommenced its murmur, and they could hear the droning of a bee above them and the rustling of the reed, she was murmuring, too, with her face against his breast: "You did not think it strange that I should follow you — that I should risk everything to tell you what I have told you before I told you anything else? You will never hate me for it, George?"

There was another silence still more prolonged, and when he looked again into the flushed face and glistening eyes he was saying, "I have *always* loved you. I know now I loved you from the first, from the day when I leaned over you to take little Sta from your lap and saw your tenderness for him in your eyes. I could have kissed you *then*, dearest, as I do now."

"And," she said, when she had gained her smiling breath again, "you will always remember, George, that you told me this *before* I told you anything of her."

"*Her?* Of whom, dearest?" he asked, leaning over her tenderly.

“Of Kitty — of your wife,” she said impatiently, as she drew back shyly with her former intense gaze.

He did not seem to grasp her meaning, but said gravely, “Let us not talk of her *now*. Later we shall have *much* to say of her. For,” he added quietly, “you know I must tell her all.”

The color faded from her cheek. “Tell her all!” she repeated vacantly; then suddenly she turned upon him eagerly, and said, “But what if she is gone?”

“Gone?” he repeated.

“Yes; gone. What if she has run away with Van Loo? What if she has disgraced you and her child?”

“What do you mean?” he said, seizing both her hands and gazing at her fixedly.

“I mean,” she said, with a half-frightened eagerness, “that she has already gone with Van Loo. George! George!” she burst out suddenly and passionately, falling upon her knees before him, “do you think that I would have followed you here and told you what I did if I thought that she had now the slightest claim upon your love or honor? Don’t you understand me? I came to tell

you of her flight to Boomville with that man; how I accidentally intercepted them there; how I tried to save her from him, and even lied to you to try to save her from your indignation; but how she deceived me as she has you, and even escaped and joined her lover while you were with me. I came to tell you that and nothing more, George, I swear it. But when you were kind to me and pitied me, I was mad—wild! I wanted to win you first out of your own love. I wanted you to respond to *mine* before you knew your wife was faithless. Yet I would have saved her if I could. Listen, George! A moment more before you speak!”

Then she hurriedly told him all; the whole story of his wife's dishonor, from her entrance into the sitting-room with Van Loo, her later appeal for concealment from her husband's unexpected presence, to the use she made of that concealment to fly with her lover. She spared no detail, and even repeated the insult Mrs. Barker had cast upon her with the triumphant reproach that her husband would not believe her. “Perhaps,” she added bitterly, “you may not believe me now. I could even stand that

from you, George, if it could make you happier; but you would still have to believe it from others. The people at the Boomville Hotel saw them leave it together."

"I do believe you," he said slowly, but with downcast eyes, "and if I did not love you before you told me this I could love you now for the part you have taken; but" — He stopped.

"You love her still," she burst out, "and I might have known it. Perhaps," she went on distractedly, "you love her the more that you have lost her. It is the way of men — and women."

"If I had loved her truly," said Barker, lifting his frank eyes to hers, "I could not have touched *your* lips. I could not even have wished to — as I did three years ago — as I did last night. Then I feared it was my weakness, now I know it was my love. I have thought of it ever since, even while waiting my wife's return here, knowing that I did not and never could have loved her. But for that very reason I must try to save her for her own sake, if I cannot save her for mine; and if I fail, dearest, it shall not be said that we climbed to happiness over

her back bent with the burden of her shame. If I loved you and told you so, thinking her still guiltless and innocent, how could I profit now by her fault?"

Mrs. Horncastle saw too late her mistake. "Then you would take her back?" she said frenziedly.

"To my home — which is hers — yes. To my heart — no. She never was there."

"And *I*," said Mrs. Horncastle, with a quivering lip, — "where do *I* go when you have settled this? Back to my past again? Back to my husbandless, childless life?"

She was turning away, but Barker caught her in his arms again. "No!" he said, his whole face suddenly radiating with hope and youthful enthusiasm. "No! Kitty will help us; we will tell her all. You do not know her, dearest, as I do — how good and kind she is, in spite of all. We will appeal to her; she will devise some means by which, without the scandal of a divorce, she and I may be separated. She will take dear little Sta with her — it is only right, poor girl; but she will let me come and see him. She will be a sister to us, dearest. Courage! All will come right yet. Trust to me."

An hysterical laugh came to Mrs. Horncastle's lips and then stopped. For as she looked up at him in his supreme hopefulness, his divine confidence in himself and others — at his handsome face beaming with love and happiness, and his clear gray eyes glittering with an almost spiritual prescience — she, woman of the world and bitter experience, and perfectly cognizant of her own and Kitty's possibilities, was, nevertheless, completely carried away by her lover's optimism. For of all optimism that of love is the most convincing. Dear boy! — for he was but a boy in experience — only his love for her could work this magic. So she gave him kiss for kiss, largely believing, largely hoping, that Mrs. Barker was in love with Van Loo and would *not* return. And in this hope an invincible belief in the folly of her own sex soothed and sustained her.

“We must go now, dearest,” said Barker, pointing to the sun already near the meridian. Three hours had fled, they knew not how. “I will bring you back to the hill again, but there we had better separate, you taking your way alone to the hotel as you came, and I will go a little way on the road

to the Divide and return later. Keep your own counsel about Kitty for her sake and ours; perhaps no one else may know the truth yet." With a farewell kiss they plunged again hand in hand through the cool bracken and again through the hot manzanita bushes, and so parted on the hilltop, as they had never parted before, leaving their whole world behind them.

Barker walked slowly along the road under the flickering shade of wayside sycamore, his sensitive face also alternating with his thought in lights and shadows. Presently there crept towards him out of the distance a halting, vacillating, deviating buggy, trailing a cloud of dust after it like a broken wing. As it came nearer he could see that the horse was spent and exhausted, and that the buggy's sole occupant — a woman — was equally exhausted in her monotonous attempt to urge it forward with whip and reins that rose and fell at intervals with feeble reiteration. Then he stepped out of the shadow and stood in the middle of the sunlit road to await it. For he recognized his wife.

The buggy came nearer. And then the

most exquisite pang he had ever felt before at his wife's hands shot through him. For as she recognized him she made a wild but impotent attempt to dash past him, and then as suddenly pulled up in the ditch.

He went up to her. She was dirty, she was disheveled, she was haggard, she was plain. There were rings of dust round her tear-swept eyes and smudges of dust-dried perspiration over her fair cheek. He thought of the beauty, freshness, and elegance of the woman he had just left, and an infinite pity swept the soul of this weak-minded gentleman. He ran towards her, and tenderly lifting her in her shame-stained garments from the buggy, said hurriedly, "I know it all, poor Kitty! You heard the news of Van Loo's flight, and you ran over to the Divide to try and save some of your money. Why did n't you wait? Why did n't you tell me?"

There was no mistaking the reality of his words, the genuine pity and tenderness of his action; but the woman saw before her only the familiar dupe of her life, and felt an infinite relief mingled with a certain contempt for his weakness and anger at her previous fears of him.

“ You might have driven over, then, yourself,” she said in a high, querulous voice, “ if you knew it so well, and have spared *me* this horrid, dirty, filthy, hopeless expedition, for I have not saved anything — there ! And I have had all this disgusting bother ! ”

For an instant he was sorely tempted to lift his eyes to her face, but he checked himself ; then he gently took her dust-coat from her shoulders and shook it out, wiped the dust from her face and eyes with his own handkerchief, held her hat and blew the dust from it with a vivid memory of performing the same service for Mrs. Horncastle only an hour before, while she arranged her hair ; and then, lifting her again into the buggy, said quietly, as he took his seat beside her and grasped the reins :—

“ I will drive you to the hotel by way of the stables, and you can go at once to your room and change your clothes. You are tired, you are nervous and worried, and want rest. Don't tell me anything now until you feel quite yourself again.”

He whipped up the horse, who, recognizing another hand at the reins, lunged forward in a final effort, and in a few minutes they were at the hotel.

As Mrs. Horncastle sat at luncheon in the great dining-room, a little pale and abstracted, she saw Mrs. Barker sweep confidently into the room, fresh, rosy, and in a new and ravishing toilette. With a swift glance of conscious power towards the other guests she walked towards Mrs. Horncastle. "Ah, here you are, dear," she said in a voice that could easily reach all ears, "and you've arrived only a little before me, after all. And I've had such an *awful* drive to the Divide! And only think! poor George telegraphed to me at Boomville not to worry, and his dispatch has only just come back here."

And with a glance of complacency she laid Barker's gentle and forgiving dispatch before the astonished Mrs. Horncastle.

CHAPTER VIII.

As the day advanced the excitement over the financial crisis increased at Hymettus, until, in spite of its remote and peaceful isolation, it seemed to throb through all its verandas and corridors with some pulsation from the outer world. Besides the letters and dispatches brought by hurried messengers and by coach from the Divide, there was a crowd of guests and servants around the branch telegraph at the new Heavy Tree post-office which was constantly augmenting. Added to the natural anxiety of the deeply interested was the stimulated fever of the few who wished to be "in the fashion." It was early rumored that a heavy operator, a guest of the hotel, who was also a director in the telegraph company, had bought up the wires for his sole use, that the dispatches were doctored in his interests as a "bear," and there was wild talk of lynching by the indignant mob. Pas-

sengers from Sacramento, San Francisco, and Marysville brought incredible news and the wildest sensations. Firm after firm had failed in the great cities. Old established houses that dated back to the "spring of '49," and had weathered the fires and inundations of their perilous Californian infancy, collapsed before this mysterious, invisible, impalpable breath of panic. Companies rooted in respectability and sneered at for old-fashioned ways were discovered to have shamelessly speculated with trusts! An eminent deacon and pillar of the church was found dead in his room with a bullet in his heart and a damning confession on the desk before him! Foreign bankers were sending their gold out of the country; government would be appealed to to open the vaults of the Mint; there would be an embargo on all bullion shipment! Nothing was too wild or preposterous to be repeated or credited.

And with this fever of sordid passion the summer temperature had increased. For the last two weeks the thermometer had stood abnormally high during the day-long sunshine; and the metallic dust in the roads

over mineral ranges pricked the skin like red-hot needles. In the deepest woods the aromatic sap stood in beads on felled logs and splintered tree-shafts; even the mountain night breeze failed to cool these baked and heated fastnesses. There were ominous clouds of smoke by day that were pillars of fire by night along the distant valleys. Some of the nearer crests were etched against the midnight sky by dull red creeping lines like a dying firework. The great hotel itself creaked and crackled and warped through all its painted, blistered, and veneered expanse, and was filled with the stifling breath of desiccation. The stucco cracked and crumbled away from the cornices; there were yawning gaps in the boarded floors beneath the Turkey carpets. Plate-glass windows became hopelessly fixed in their warped and twisted sashes, and added to the heat; there was a warm incense of pine sap in the dining-room that flavored all the cuisine. And yet the babble of stocks and shares went on, and people pricked their ears over their soup to catch the gossip of the last arrival.

Demorest, loathing it all in his new-found

bitterness, was nevertheless impatient in his inaction, and was eagerly awaiting a telegram from Stacy ; Barker had disappeared since luncheon. Suddenly there was a commotion on the veranda as a carriage drove up with a handsome, gray-haired woman. In the buzzing of voices around him Demorest heard the name of Mrs. Van Loo. In further comments, made in more smothered accents, he heard that Van Loo had been stopped at Cañon Station, but that no warrant had yet been issued against him ; that it was generally believed that the bank dared not hold him ; that others openly averred that he had been used as a scapegoat to avert suspicion from higher guilt. And certainly Mrs. Van Loo's calm, confident air seemed to corroborate these assertions.

He was still wondering if the strange coincidence which had brought both mother and son into his own life was not merely a fancy, as far as *she* was concerned, when a waiter brought a message from Mrs. Van Loo that she would be glad to see him for a few moments in her room. Last night he could scarcely have restrained his eagerness

to meet her and elucidate the mystery of the photograph; now he was conscious of an equally strong revulsion of feeling, and a dull premonition of evil. However, it was no doubt possible that the man had told her of his previous inquiries, and she had merely acknowledged them by that message.

Demorest found Mrs. Van Loo in the private sitting-room where he and his old partners had supped on the preceding night. She received him with unmistakable courtesy and even a certain dignity that might or might not have been assumed. He had no difficulty in recognizing the son's mechanical politeness in the first, but he was puzzled at the second.

"The manager of this hotel," she began, with a foreigner's precision of English, "has just told me that you were at present occupying my rooms at his invitation, but that you wished to see me at once on my return, and I believe that I was not wrong in apprehending that you preferred to hear my wishes from my own lips rather than from an inn-keeper. I had intended to keep these rooms for some weeks, but, unfortunately for me, though fortunately for you, the present

terrible financial crisis, which has most unjustly brought my son into such scandalous prominence, will oblige me to return to San Francisco until his reputation is fully cleared of these foul aspersions. I shall only ask you to allow me the undisturbed possession of these rooms for a couple of hours until I can pack my trunks and gather up a few souvenirs that I almost always keep with me."

"Pray, consider that your wishes are my own in respect to that, my dear madam," returned Demorest gravely, "and that, indeed, I protested against even this temporary intrusion upon your apartments; but I confess that now that you have spoken of your souvenirs I have the greatest curiosity about one of them, and that even my object in seeking this interview was to gratify it. It is in regard to a photograph which I saw on the chimney-piece in your bedroom, which I think I recognized as that of some one whom I formerly knew."

There was a sudden look of sharp suspicion and even hard aggressiveness that quite changed the lady's face as he mentioned the word "souvenir," but it quickly

changed to a smile as she put up her fan with a gesture of arch deprecation, and said :

“ Ah ! I see. Of course, a lady’s photograph.”

The reply irritated Demorest. More than that, he felt a sudden sense of the absolute sentimentality of his request, and the consciousness that he was about to invite the familiar confidence of this strange woman — whose son had forged his name — in regard to *her* !

“ It was a Venetian picture,” he began, and stopped, a singular disgust keeping him from voicing the name.

But Mrs. Van Loo was less reticent. “ Oh, you mean my dearest friend — a lovely picture, and you know her ? Why, yes, surely. You are *the* Mr. Demorest who — Of course, that old love-affair. Well, you are a marvel ! Five years ago, at least, and you have not forgotten ! I really must write and tell her.”

“ Write and tell her ! ” Then it was all a lie about her death ! He felt not only his faith, his hope, his future leaving him, but even his self-control. With an effort he said : —

“I think you have already satisfied my curiosity. I was told five years ago that she was dead. It was because of the date of the photograph — two years later — that I ventured to intrude upon you. I was anxious only to know the truth.”

“She certainly was very much living and of the world when I saw her last, two years ago,” said Mrs. Van Loo, with an easy smile. “I dare say that was a ruse of her relatives — a very stupid one — to break off the affair, for I think they had other plans. But, dear me! now I remember, was there not some little quarrel between you before? Some letter from you that was not very kind? My impression is that there was something of the sort, and that the young lady was indignant. But only for a time, you know. She very soon forgot it. I dare say if you wrote something very charming to her it might not be too late. We women are very forgiving, Mr. Demorest, and although she is very much sought after, as are all young American girls whose fathers can give them a comfortable *dot*, her parents might be persuaded to throw over a poor prince for a rich countryman in the end.

Of course, you know, to you Republicans there is always something fascinating in titles and blood, and our dear friend is like other girls. Still, it is worth the risk. And five years of waiting and devotion really ought to tell. It's quite a romance! Shall I write to her and tell her I have seen you, looking well and prosperous? Nothing more. Do let me! I should be delighted."

"I think it hardly worth while for you to give yourself that trouble," said Demorest quietly, looking in Mrs. Van Loo's smiling eyes, "now that I know the story of the young lady's death was a forgery. And I will not intrude further on your time. Pray give yourself no needless hurry over your packing. I may go to San Francisco this afternoon, and not even require the rooms to-night."

"At least, let me make you a present of the souvenir as an acknowledgment of your courtesy," said Mrs. Van Loo, passing into her bedroom and returning with the photograph. "I feel that with your five years of constancy it is more yours than mine." As a gentleman Demorest knew he could not refuse, and taking the photograph from her

with a low bow, with another final salutation he withdrew.

Alone by himself in a corner of the veranda he was surprised that the interview had made so little impression on him, and had so little altered his conviction. His discovery that the announcement of his betrothed's death was a fiction did not affect the fact that though living she was yet dead to him, and apparently by her own consent. The contrast between her life and his during those five years had been covertly accented by Mrs. Van Loo, whether intentionally or not, and he saw again as last night the full extent of his sentimental folly. He could not even condole with himself that he was the victim of miserable falsehoods that others had invented. *She* had accepted them, and had even excused her desertion of him by that last deceit of the letter.

He drew out her photograph and again examined it, but not as a lover. Had she really grown stouter and more self-complacent? Was the spirituality and delicacy he had worshiped in her purely his own idiotic fancy? Had she always been like this? Yes. There was the girl who could weakly

strive, weakly revenge herself, and weakly forget. There was the figure that he had expected to find carved upon the tomb which he had long sought that he might weep over. He laughed aloud.

It was very hot, and he was stifling with inaction. What was Barker doing, and why had not Stacy telegraphed to him? And what were those people in the courtyard doing? Were they discussing news of further disaster and ruin? Perhaps he was even now a beggar. Well, his fortune might go with his faith.

But the crowd was simply looking at the roof of the hotel, and he now saw that a black smoke was drifting across the courtyard, and was conscious of a smell of soot and burning. He stepped down from the veranda among the mingled guests and servants, and saw that the smoke was only pouring from a chimney. He heard, too, that the chimney had been on fire, and that it was Mrs. Van Loo's bedroom chimney, and that when the startled servants had knocked at the locked door she had told them that she was only burning some old letters and newspapers, the refuse of her trunks.

There was naturally some indignation that the hotel had been so foolishly endangered, in such scorching weather, and the manager had had a scene with her which resulted in her leaving the hotel indignantly with her half-packed boxes. But even after the smoke had died away and the fire been extinguished in the chimney and hearth, there was an acrid smell of smouldering pine penetrating the upper floors of the hotel all that afternoon.

When Mrs. Van Loo drove away, the manager returned with Demorest to the rooms. The marble hearth was smoked and discolored and still littered with charred ashes of burnt paper. "My belief is," said the manager darkly, "that the old hag came here just to burn up a lot of incriminating papers that her son had intrusted to her keeping. It looks mighty suspicious. You see she got up an awful lot of side when I told her I did n't reckon to run a smelting furnace in a wooden hotel with the thermometer at one hundred in the office, and I reckon it was just an excuse for getting off in a hurry."

But the continued delay in Stacy's pro-

mised telegram had begun to work upon Demorest's usual equanimity, and he scarcely listened in his anxiety for his old partner. He knew that Stacy should have arrived in San Francisco by noon. He had almost determined to take the next train from the Divide when two horsemen dashed into the courtyard. There was the usual stir on the veranda and rush for news, but the two new arrivals turned out to be Barker, on a horse covered with foam, and a dashing, elegantly dressed stranger on a mustang as carefully groomed and as spotless as himself. Demorest instantly recognized Jack Hamlin.

He had not seen Hamlin since that day, five years before, when the latter had accompanied the three partners with their treasure to Boomville, and had handed him the mysterious packet. As the two men dismounted hurriedly and moved towards him, he felt a premonition of something as fateful and important as then. In obedience to a sign from Barker he led them to a more secluded angle of the veranda. He could not help noticing that his younger partner's face was mobile as ever, but more thoughtful and older ; yet

his voice rang with the old freemasonry of the camp, as he said, with a laugh, "The signal has been given, and it's boot and saddle and away."

"But I have had no dispatch from Stacy," said Demorest in surprise. "He was to telegraph to me from San Francisco in any emergency."

"He never got there at all," said Barker. "Jack ran slap into Van Loo at the Divide, and sent a dispatch to Jim, which stopped him halfway until Jack could reach him, which he nearly broke his neck to do; and then Jack finished up by bringing a message from Stacy to us that we should all meet together on the slope of Heavy Tree, near the Bar. I met Jack just as I was riding into the Divide, and came back with him. He will tell you the rest, and you can swear by what Jack says, for he's white all through," he added, laying his hand affectionately on Hamlin's shoulder.

Hamlin winced slightly. For he had not told Barker that his wife was with Van Loo, nor his first reason for interfering. But he related how he had finally overtaken Van Loo at Cañon Station, and how the fu-

gitive had disclosed the conspiracy of Steptoe and Hall against the bank and Marshall as the price of his own release. On this news, remembering that Stacy had passed the Divide on his way to the station, he had first sent a dispatch to him, and then met him at the first station on the road. "I reckon, gentlemen," said Hamlin, with an unusual earnestness in his voice, "that he 'd not only got my telegram, but *all the news* that had been flying around this morning, for he looked like a man to whom it was just a 'toss-up' whether he took his own life then and there or was willing to have somebody else take it for him, for he said, 'I'll go myself,' and telegraphed to have the surveyor stopped from coming. Then he told me to tell you fellows, and ask you to come too." Jack paused, and added half mischievously, "He sort of asked *me* what I would take to stand by him in the row, if there was one, and I told him I'd take — whiskey! You see, boys, it's a kind of off-night with me, and I would n't mind for the sake of old times to finish the game with old Steptoe that I began a matter of five years ago."

“All right,” said Demorest, with a kindling eye; “I suppose we’d better start at once. One moment,” he added. “Barker boy, will you excuse me if I speak a word to Hamlin?” As Barker nodded and walked to the rails of the veranda, Demorest took Hamlin aside. “You and I,” he said hurriedly, “are *single* men; Barker has a wife and child. This is likely to be no child’s play.”

But Jack Hamlin was no fool, and from certain leading questions which Barker had already put, but which he had skillfully evaded, he surmised that Barker knew something of his wife’s escapade. He answered a little more seriously than his wont, “I don’t think as regards *his wife* that would make much difference to him or her how stiff the work was.”

Demorest turned away with his last pang of bitterness. It needed only this confirmation of all that Stacy had hinted, of what he himself had seen in his brief interview with Mrs. Barker since his return, to shake his last remaining faith. “We’ll all go together, then,” he said, with a laugh, “as in the old times, and perhaps it’s as well that we have no woman in our confidence.”

An hour later the three men passed quietly out of the hotel, scarcely noticed by the other guests, who were also oblivious of their absence during the evening. For Mrs. Barker, quite recovered from her fatiguing ride, was in high spirits and the most beautiful and spotless of summer gowns, and was considered quite a heroine by the other ladies as she dwelt upon the terrible heat of her return journey. "Only I knew Mr. Barker would be worried — and the poor man actually walked a mile down the Divide road to meet me — I believe I should have stayed there all day." She glanced round the other groups for Mrs. Horncastle, but that lady had retired early. Possibly she alone had noticed the absence of the two partners.

The guests sat up until quite late, for the heat seemed to grow still more oppressive, and the strange smell of burning wood revived the gossip about Mrs. Van Loo and her stupidity in setting fire to her chimney. Some averred that it would be days before the smell could be got out of the house; others referred it to the fires in the woods, which were now dangerously near. One spoke of

the isolated position of the hotel as affording the greatest security, but was met by the assertion of a famous mountaineer that the forest fires were wont to leap from crest to crest mysteriously, without any apparent continuous contact. This led to more or less light-hearted conjecture of present danger and some amusing stories of hotel fires and their ludicrous revelations. There were also some entertaining speculations as to what they would do and what they would try to save in such an emergency.

“For myself,” said Mrs. Barker audaciously, “I should certainly let Mr. Barker look after Sta and confine myself entirely to getting away with my diamonds. I know the wretch would never think of them.”

It was still later when, exhausted by the heat and some reaction from the excitement of the day, they at last deserted the veranda for their rooms, and for a while the shadowy bulk of the whole building was picked out with regularly spaced lights from its open windows, until now these finally faded and went out one by one. An hour later the whole building had sunk to rest. It was said that it was only four in the morning

when a yawning porter, having put out the light in a dark, upper corridor, was amazed by a dull glow from the top of the wall, and awoke to the fact that a red fire, as yet smokeless and flameless, was creeping along the cornice. He ran to the office and gave the alarm; but on returning with assistance was stopped in the corridor by an impenetrable wall of smoke veined with murky flashes. The alarm was given in all the lower floors, and the occupants rushed from their beds half dressed to the courtyard, only to see, as they afterwards averred, the flames burst like cannon discharges from the upper windows and unite above the crackling roof. So sudden and complete was the catastrophe, although slowly prepared by a leak in the overheated chimney between the floors, that even the excitement of fear and exertion was spared the survivors. There was bewilderment and stupor, but neither uproar nor confusion. People found themselves wandering in the woods, half awake and half dressed, having descended from the balconies and leaped from the windows, — they knew not how. Others on the upper floor neither awoke nor moved

from their beds, but were suffocated without a cry. From the first an instinctive idea of the hopelessness of combating the conflagration possessed them all; to a blind, automatic feeling to flee the building was added the slow mechanism of the somnambulist; delicate women walked speechlessly, but securely, along ledges and roofs from which they would have fallen by the mere light of reason and of day. There was no crowding or impeding haste in their dumb exodus. It was only when Mrs. Barker awoke disheveled in the courtyard, and with an hysterical outcry rushed back into the hotel, that there was any sign of panic.

Mrs. Horncastle, who was standing near, fully dressed as from some night-long vigil, quickly followed her. The half-frantic woman was making directly for her own apartments, whose windows those in the courtyard could see were already belching smoke. Suddenly Mrs. Horncastle stopped with a bitter cry and clasped her forehead. It had just flashed upon her that Mrs. Barker had told her only a few hours before that Sta had been removed with the nurse to the *upper floor!* It was not the forgotten child that

Mrs. Barker was returning for, but her diamonds! Mrs. Horncastle called her; she did not reply. The smoke was already pouring down the staircase. Mrs. Horncastle hesitated for a moment only, and then, drawing a long breath, dashed up the stairs. On the first landing she stumbled over something — the prostrate figure of the nurse. But this saved her, for she found that near the floor she could breathe more freely. Before her appeared to be an open door. She crept along towards it on her hands and knees. The frightened cry of a child, awakened from its sleep in the dark, gave her nerve to rise, enter the room, and dash open the window. By the flashing light she could see a little figure rising from a bed. It was Sta. There was not a moment to be lost, for the open window was beginning to draw the smoke from the passage. Luckily, the boy, by some childish instinct, threw his arms round her neck and left her hands free. Whispering him to hold tight, she clambered out of the window. A narrow ledge of cornice scarcely wide enough for her feet ran along the house to a distant balcony. With her back to the house she

zigzagged her feet along the cornice to get away from the smoke, which now poured directly from the window. Then she grew dizzy ; the weight of the child on her bosom seemed to be toppling her forward towards the abyss below. She closed her eyes, frantically grasping the child with crossed arms on her breast as she stood on the ledge, until, as seen from below through the twisting smoke, they might have seemed a figure of the Madonna and Child niched in the wall. Then a voice from above called to her, "Courage!" and she felt the flap of a twisted sheet lowered from an upper window against her face. She grasped it eagerly ; it held firmly. Then she heard a cry from below, saw them carrying a ladder, and at last was lifted with her burden from the ledge by powerful hands. Then only did she raise her eyes to the upper window whence had come her help. Smoke and flame were pouring from it. The unknown hero who had sacrificed his only chance of escape to her remained forever unknown.

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Only four miles away that night a group of men were waiting for the dawn in the

shadow of a pine near Heavy Tree Bar. As the sky glowed redly over the crest between them and Hymettus, Hamlin said:—

“Another one of those forest fires. It’s this side of Black Spur, and a big one, I reckon.”

“Do you know,” said Barker thoughtfully, “I was thinking of the time the old cabin burnt up on Heavy Tree. It looks to be about in the same place.”

“Hush!” said Stacy sharply.

CHAPTER IX.

AN abandoned tunnel — an irregular orifice in the mountain flank which looked like a dried-up sewer that had disgorged through its opening the refuse of the mountain in red slime, gravel, and a peculiar clay known as “cement,” in a foul streak down its side; a narrow ledge on either side, broken up by heaps of quartz, tailings, and rock, and half hidden in scrub, oak, and myrtle; a decaying cabin of logs, bark, and cobblestones — these made up the exterior of the Marshall claim. To this defacement of the mountain, the rude clearing of thicket and underbrush by fire or blasting, the lopping of tree-boughs and the decapitation of saplings, might be added the débris and ruins of half-civilized occupancy. The ground before the cabin was covered with broken boxes, tin cans, the staves and broken hoops of casks, and the cast-off rags of blankets and clothing. The whole claim in its unsavory, un-

picturesque details, and its vulgar story of sordid, reckless, and selfish occupancy and abandonment, was a foul blot on the landscape, which the first rosy dawn only made the more offending. Surely the last spot in the world that men should quarrel and fight for!

So thought George Barker, as with his companions they moved in single file slowly towards it. The little party consisted only of himself, Demorest, and Stacy; Marshall and Hamlin — according to a prearranged plan — were still in ambush to join them at the first appearance of Steptoe and his gang. The claim was yet unoccupied; they had secured their first success. Steptoe's followers, unaware that his design had been discovered, and confident that they could easily reach the claim before Marshall and the surveyor, had lingered. Some of them had held a drunken carouse at their rendezvous at Heavy Tree. Others were still engaged in procuring shovels and picks and pans for their mock equipment as miners, and this, again, gave Marshall's adherents the advantage. *They* knew that their opponents would probably first approach the

empty claim encumbered only with their peaceful implements, while they themselves had brought their rifles with them.

Stacy, who by tacit consent led the party, on reaching the claim at once posted Demorest and Barker each behind a separate heap of quartz tailings on the ledge, which afforded them a capital breastwork, and stationed himself at the mouth of the tunnel which was nearest the trail. It had already been arranged what each man was to do. They were in possession. For the rest they must wait. What they thought at that moment no one knew. Their characteristic appearance had slightly changed. The melancholy and philosophic Demorest was alert and bitter. Barker's changeful face had become fixed and steadfast. Stacy alone wore his "fighting look," which the others had remembered.

They had not long to wait. The sounds of rude laughter, coarse skylarking, and voices more or less still confused with half-spent liquor came from the rocky trail. And then Steptoe appeared with part of his straggling followers, who were celebrating their easy invasion by clattering their picks

and shovels and beating loudly upon their tins and prospecting-pans. The three partners quickly recognized the stamp of the strangers, in spite of their peaceful implements. They were the waifs and strays of San Francisco wharves, of Sacramento dens, of dissolute mountain towns; and there was not, probably, a single actual miner among them. A raging scorn and contempt took possession of Barker and Demorest, but Stacy knew their exact value. As Steptoe passed before the opening of the tunnel he heard the cry of "Halt!"

He looked up. He saw Stacy not thirty yards before him with his rifle at half-cock. He saw Barker and Demorest, fully armed, rise from behind their breastworks of rock along the ledge and thus fully occupy the claim. But he saw more. He saw that his plot was known. Outlaw and desperado as he was, he saw that he had lost his moral power in this actual possession, and that from that moment he must be the aggressor. He saw he was fighting no irresponsible hirelings like his own, but men of position and importance, whose loss would make a stir. Against their rifles the few revolvers

that his men chanced to have slung to them were of little avail. But he was not cowed, although his few followers stumbled together at this momentary check, half angrily, half timorously like wolves without a leader. "Bring up the other men and their guns," he whispered fiercely to the nearest. Then he faced Stacy.

"Who are *you* to stop peaceful miners going to work on their own claim?" he said coarsely. "I'll tell you *who*, boys," he added, suddenly turning to his men with a hoarse laugh. "It ain't even the bank! It's only Jim Stacy, that the bank kicked out yesterday to save itself, — Jim Stacy and his broken-down pals. And what's the thief doing here — in Marshall's tunnel — the only spot that Marshall can claim? We ain't no particular friends o' Marshall's, though we're neighbors on the same claim; but we ain't going to see Marshall ousted by tramps. Are we, boys?"

"No, by G—d!" said his followers, dropping the pans and seizing their picks and revolvers. They understood the appeal to arms if not to their reason. For an instant the fight seemed imminent. Then a voice from behind them said: —

“ You need n’t trouble yourselves about that! *I’m* Marshall! I sent these gentlemen to occupy the claim until I came here with the surveyor,” and two men stepped from a thicket of myrtle in the rear of Steptoe and his followers. The speaker, Marshall, was a thin, slight, overworked, over-aged man; his companion, the surveyor, was equally slight, but red-bearded, spectacled, and professional-looking, with a long traveling-duster that made him appear even clerical. They were scarcely a physical addition to Stacy’s party, whatever might have been their moral and legal support.

But it was just this support that Steptoe strangely clung to in his designs for the future, and a wild idea seized him. The surveyor was really the only disinterested witness between the two parties. If Steptoe could confuse his mind before the actual fighting — from which he would, of course, escape as a non-combatant — it would go far afterwards to rehabilitate Steptoe’s party. “ Very well, then,” he said to Marshall, “ I shall call this gentleman to witness that we have been attacked here in peaceable possession of our part of the claim by these

armed strangers, and whether they are acting on your order or not, their blood will be on your head."

"Then I reckon," said the surveyor, as he tore away his beard, wig, spectacles, and mustache, and revealed the figure of Jack Hamlin, "that I'm about the last witness that Mr. Steptoe-Horncastle ought to call, and about the last witness that he ever *will* call!"

But he had not calculated upon the desperation of Steptoe over the failure of this last hope. For there sprang up in the outlaw's brain the same hideous idea that he voiced to his companions at the Divide. With a hoarse cry to his followers, he crashed his pickaxe into the brain of Marshall, who stood near him, and sprang forward. Three or four shots were exchanged. Two of his men fell, a bullet from Stacy's rifle pierced Steptoe's leg, and he dropped forward on one knee. He heard the steps of his reinforcements with their weapons coming close behind him, and rolled aside on the sloping ledge to let them pass. But he rolled too far. He felt himself slipping down the mountain-side in the slimy shoot of the tunnel. He made a

desperate attempt to recover himself, but the treacherous drift of the loose débris rolled with him, as if he were part of its refuse, and, carrying him down, left him unconscious, but otherwise uninjured, in the bushes of the second ledge five hundred feet below.

When he recovered his senses the shouts and outcries above him had ceased. He knew he was safe. The ledge could only be reached by a circuitous route three miles away. He knew, too, that if he could only reach a point of outcrop a hundred yards away he could easily descend to the stage road, down the gentle slope of the mountain hidden in a growth of hazel-brush. He bound up his wounded leg, and dragged himself on his hands and knees laboriously to the outcrop. He did not look up; since his pick had crashed into Marshall's brain he had but one blind thought before him — to escape at once! That his revenge and compensation would come later he never doubted. He limped and crept, rolled and fell, from bush to bush through the sloping thickets, until he saw the red road a few feet below him.

If he only had a horse he could put miles

between him and any present pursuit! Why should he not have one? The road was frequented by solitary horsemen — miners and Mexicans. He had his revolver with him; what mattered the life of another man if he escaped from the consequences of the one he had just taken? He heard the clatter of hoofs; two priests on mules rode slowly by; he ground his teeth with disappointment. But they had scarcely passed before another and more rapid clatter came from their rear. It was a lad on horseback. He started. It was his own son!

He remembered in a flash how the boy had said he was coming to meet the padre at the station on that day. His first impulse was to hide himself, his wound, and his defeat from the lad, but the blind idea of escape was still paramount. He leaned over the bank and called to him. The astonished lad cantered eagerly to his side.

“Give me your horse, Eddy,” said the father; “I’m in bad luck, and must get.”

The boy glanced at his father’s face, at his tattered garments and bandaged leg, and read the whole story. It was a familiar page to him. He paled first and then flushed,

and then, with an odd glitter in his eyes, said, "Take me with you, father. Do! You always did before. I'll bring you luck."

Desperation is superstitious. Why not take him? They had been lucky before, and the two together might confound any description of their identity to the pursuers. "Help me up, Eddy, and then get up before me."

"*Behind*, you mean," said the boy, with a laugh, as he helped his father into the saddle.

"No," said Steptoe harshly. "*Before* me, — do you hear? And if anything happens *behind* you, don't look! If I drop off, don't stop! Don't get down, but go on and leave me. Do you understand?" he repeated almost savagely.

"Yes," said the boy tremulously.

"All right," said the father, with a softer voice, as he passed his one arm round the boy's body and lifted the reins. "Hold tight when we come to the cross-roads, for we'll take the first turn, for old luck's sake, to the Mission."

They were the last words exchanged be-

tween them, for as they wheeled rapidly to the left at the cross-roads, Jack Hamlin and Demorest swung as quickly out of another road to the right immediately behind them. Jack's challenge to "Halt!" was only answered by Steptoe's horse springing forward under the sharp lash of the riata.

"Hold up!" said Jack suddenly, laying his hand upon the rifle which Demorest had lifted to his shoulder. "He's carrying some one, — a wounded comrade, I reckon. We don't want *him*. Swing out and go for the horse; well forward, in the neck or shoulder."

Demorest swung far out to the right of the road and raised his rifle. As it cracked Steptoe's horse seemed to have suddenly struck some obstacle ahead of him rather than to have been hit himself, for his head went down with his fore feet under him, and he turned a half-somersault on the road, flinging his two riders a dozen feet away.

Steptoe scrambled to his knees, revolver in hand, but the other figure never moved. "Hands up!" said Jack, sighting his own weapon. The reports seemed simultaneous, but Jack's bullet had pierced Steptoe's brain

even before the outlaw's pistol exploded harmlessly in the air.

The two men dismounted, but by a common instinct they both ran to the prostrate figure that had never moved.

"By God! it's a boy!" said Jack, leaning over the body and lifting the shoulders from which the head hung loosely. "Neck broken and dead as his pal." Suddenly he started, and, to Demorest's astonishment, began hurriedly pulling off the glove from the boy's limp right hand.

"What are you doing?" demanded Demorest in creeping horror.

"Look!" said Jack, as he laid bare the small white hand. The first two fingers were merely unsightly stumps that had been hidden in the padded glove.

"Good God! Van Loo's brother!" said Demorest, recoiling.

"No!" said Jack, with a grim face, "it's what I have long suspected, — it's Steptoe's son!"

"His son?" repeated Demorest.

"Yes," said Jack; and he added, after looking at the two bodies with a long-drawn whistle of concern, "and I would n't, if I were you, say anything of this to Barker."

“Why?” said Demorest.

“Well,” returned Jack, “when our scrimmage was over down there, and they brought the news to Barker that his wife and her diamonds were burnt up at the hotel, you remember that they said that Mrs. Horncastle had saved his boy.”

“Yes,” said Demorest; “but what has that to do with it?”

“Nothing, I reckon,” said Jack, with a slight shrug of his shoulders, “only Mrs. Horncastle was the mother of the boy that’s lying there.”

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Two years later as Demorest and Stacy sat before the fire in the old cabin on Marshall’s claim — now legally their own — they looked from the door beyond the great bulk of Black Spur to the pallid snow-line of the Sierras, still as remote and unchanged to them as when they had gazed upon it from Heavy Tree Hill. And, for the matter of that, they themselves seemed to have been left so unchanged that even now, as in the old days, it was Barker’s voice as he greeted them from the darkening trail that alone broke their reverie.

"Well," said Demorest cheerfully, "your usual luck, Barker boy!" for they already saw in his face the happy light they had once seen there on an eventful night seven years ago.

"I'm to be married to Mrs. Horncastle next month," he said breathlessly, "and little Sta loves her already as if she was his own mother. Wish me joy."

A slight shadow passed over Stacy's face; but his hand was the first to grasp Barker's, and his voice the first to say "Amen!"

UNDER THE REDWOODS

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UNDER THE REDWOODS

JIMMY'S BIG BROTHER FROM CALIFORNIA

As night crept up from the valley that stormy afternoon, Sawyer's Ledge was at first quite blotted out by wind and rain, but presently reappeared in little nebulous star-like points along the mountain side, as the straggling cabins of the settlement were one by one lit up by the miners returning from tunnel and claim. These stars were of varying brilliancy that evening, two notably so—one that eventually resolved itself into a many-candled illumination of a cabin of evident festivity; the other into a glimmering taper in the window of a silent one. They might have represented the extreme mutations of fortune in the settlement that night: the celebration of a strike by Robert Falloner, a lucky miner; and the sick-bed of Dick Lasham, an unlucky one.

The latter was, however, not quite alone. He was ministered to by Daddy Folsom, a weak but emotional and aggressively hopeful neighbor, who was sitting beside the wooden bunk whereon the invalid lay. Yet there was something perfunctory in his attitude: his eyes were continually straying to the window, whence the illuminated Falloner festivities could be seen between the trees, and his ears were more intent on the songs and laughter that came faintly from the distance than on the feverish breathing and unintelligible moans of the sufferer.

Nevertheless, he looked troubled equally by the condition of his charge and by his own enforced absence from the revels. A more impatient moan from the sick man, however, brought a change to his abstracted face, and he turned to him with an exaggerated expression of sympathy.

"In course! Lordy! I know jest what those pains are: kinder ez ef you was havin' a tooth pulled that had roots branchin' all over ye! My! I've jest had 'em so bad I could n't keep from yellin'! That's hot rheumatics! Yes, sir, I oughter know! And" (confidentially) "the sing'ler thing about 'em is that they get worse jest as

they 're going off — sorter wringin' yer hand and punchin' ye in the back to say 'Good-by.' There!" he continued, as the man sank exhaustedly back on his rude pillow of flour-sacks. "There! did n't I tell ye? Ye'll be all right in a minit, and ez chipper ez a jay bird in the mornin'. Oh, don't tell me about rheumatics — I've bin thar! On'y mine was the cold kind — that hangs on longest — yours is the hot, that burns itself up in no time!"

If the flushed face and bright eyes of Lasham were not enough to corroborate this symptom of high fever, the quick, wandering laugh he gave would have indicated the point of delirium. But the too optimistic Daddy Folsom referred this act to improvement, and went on cheerfully: "Yes, sir, you 're better now, and" — here he assumed an air of cautious deliberation, extravagant, as all his assumptions were — "I ain't sayin' that — ef — you — was — to — rise — up" (very slowly) "and heave a blanket or two over your shoulders — jest by way o' caution, you know — and leanin' on me, kinder meander over to Bob Falloner's cabin and the boys, it would n't do you a heap o' good. Changes o' this kind is often pre-

scribed by the faculty." Another moan from the sufferer, however, here apparently corrected Daddy's too favorable prognosis. "Oh, all right! Well, perhaps ye know best; and I'll jest run over to Bob's and say how as ye ain't comin', and will be back in a jiffy!"

"The letter," said the sick man hurriedly, "the letter, the letter!"

Daddy leaned suddenly over the bed. It was impossible for even his hopefulness to avoid the fact that Lasham was delirious. It was a strong factor in the case — one that would certainly justify his going over to Falloner's with the news. For the present moment, however, this aberration was to be accepted cheerfully and humored after Daddy's own fashion. "Of course — the letter, the letter," he said convincingly; "that's what the boys hev bin singin' jest now —

'Good-by, Charley; when you are away,
Write me a letter, love; send me a letter, love!'

That's what you heard, and a mighty purty song it is too, and kinder clings to you. It's wonderful how these things gets in your head."

"The letter — write — send money —

money — money, and the photograph — the photograph — photograph — money,” continued the sick man, in the rapid reiteration of delirium.

“In course you will — to-morrow — when the mail goes,” returned Daddy soothingly; “plenty of them. Jest now you try to get a snooze, will ye? Hol’ on! — take some o’ this.”

There was an anodyne mixture on the rude shelf, which the doctor had left on his morning visit. Daddy had a comfortable belief that what would relieve pain would also check delirium, and he accordingly measured out a dose with a liberal margin to allow of waste by the patient in swallowing in his semi-conscious state. As he lay more quiet, muttering still, but now unintelligibly, Daddy, waiting for a more complete unconsciousness and the opportunity to slip away to Falloner’s, cast his eyes around the cabin. He noticed now for the first time since his entrance that a crumpled envelope bearing a Western post-mark was lying at the foot of the bed. Daddy knew that the tri-weekly post had arrived an hour before he came, and that Lasham had evidently received a letter. Sure enough the

letter itself was lying against the wall beside him. It was open. Daddy felt justified in reading it.

It was curt and business-like, stating that unless Lasham at once sent a remittance for the support of his brother and sister — two children in charge of the writer — they must find a home elsewhere. That the arrears were long standing, and the repeated promises of Lasham to send money had been unfulfilled. That the writer could stand it no longer. This would be his last communication unless the money were sent forthwith.

It was by no means a novel or, under the circumstances, a shocking disclosure to Daddy. He had seen similar missives from daughters, and even wives, consequent on the varying fortunes of his neighbors; no one knew better than he the uncertainties of a miner's prospects, and yet the inevitable hopefulness that buoyed him up. He tossed it aside impatiently, when his eye caught a strip of paper he had overlooked lying upon the blanket near the envelope. It contained a few lines in an unformed boyish hand addressed to "my brother," and evidently slipped into the letter after it

was written. By the uncertain candlelight Daddy read as follows:—

Dear Brother, Rite to me and Cissy rite off. Why aint you done it? It's so long since you rote any. Mister Recketts ses you dont care any more. Wen you rite send your fotograff. Folks here ses I aint got no big bruther any way, as I disremember his looks, and cant say wots like him. Cissy's kryin' all along of it. I've got a hedake. William Walker make it ake by a blo. So no more at present from your loving little bruther Jim.

The quick, hysteric laugh with which Daddy read this was quite consistent with his responsive, emotional nature; so, too, were the ready tears that sprang to his eyes. He put the candle down unsteadily, with a casual glance at the sick man. It was notable, however, that this look contained less sympathy for the ailing "big brother" than his emotion might have suggested. For Daddy was carried quite away by his own mental picture of the helpless children, and eager only to relate his impressions of the incident. He cast another glance at the

invalid, thrust the papers into his pocket, and clapping on his hat slipped from the cabin and ran to the house of festivity. Yet it was characteristic of the man, and so engrossed was he by his one idea, that to the usual inquiries regarding his patient he answered, "He's all right," and plunged at once into the incident of the dunning letter, reserving — with the instinct of an emotional artist — the child's missive until the last. As he expected, the money demand was received with indignant criticisms of the writer.

"That's just like 'em in the States," said Captain Fletcher; "darned if they don't believe we've only got to bore a hole in the ground and snake out a hundred dollars. Why, there's my wife — with a heap of boss sense in everything else — is allus wonderin' why I can't rake in a cool fifty betwixt one steamer day and another."

"That's nothin' to my old dad," interrupted Gus Houston, the "infant" of the camp, a bright-eyed young fellow of twenty; "why, he wrote to me yesterday that if I'd only pick up a single piece of gold every day and just put it aside, sayin' 'That's for popper and mommer,' and not fool it away — it would be all they'd ask of me."

"That 's so," added another; "these ignorant relations is just the ruin o' the mining industry. Bob Falloner hez bin lucky in his strike to-day, but he 's a darned sight luckier in being without kith or kin that he knows of."

Daddy waited until the momentary irritation had subsided, and then drew the other letter from his pocket. "That ain't all, boys," he began in a faltering voice, but gradually working himself up to a pitch of pathos; "just as I was thinking all them very things, I kinder noticed this yer poor little bit o' paper lyin' thar lonesome like and forgotten, and I—read it—and well—gentlemen—it just choked me right up!" He stopped, and his voice faltered.

"Go slow, Daddy, go slow!" said an auditor smilingly. It was evident that Daddy's sympathetic weakness was well known.

Daddy read the child's letter. But, unfortunately, what with his real emotion and the intoxication of an audience, he read it extravagantly, and interpolated a child's lisp (on no authority whatever), and a simulated infantile delivery, which, I fear, at first provoked the smiles rather than the tears of his audience. Nevertheless, at its

conclusion the little note was handed round the party, and then there was a moment of thoughtful silence.

"Tell you what it is, boys," said Fletcher, looking around the table, "we ought to be doin' suthin' for them kids right off! Did you," turning to Daddy, "say anythin' about this to Dick?"

"Nary — why, he's clean off his head with fever — don't understand a word — and just babbles," returned Daddy, forgetful of his roseate diagnosis a moment ago, "and has n't got a cent."

"We must make up what we can amongst us afore the mail goes to-night," said the "infant," feeling hurriedly in his pockets. "Come, ante up, gentlemen," he added, laying the contents of his buckskin purse upon the table.

"Hold on, boys," said a quiet voice. It was their host Falloner, who had just risen and was slipping on his oilskin coat. "You've got enough to do, I reckon, to look after your own folks. I've none! Let this be my affair. I've got to go to the Express Office anyhow to see about my passage home, and I'll just get a draft for a hundred dollars for that old skeesicks —

what's his blamed name? Oh, Ricketts" — he made a memorandum from the letter — "and I'll send it by express. Meantime, you fellows sit down there and write something — you know what — saying that Dick's hurt his hand and can't write — you know; but asked you to send a draft, which you're doing. Sabe? That's all! I'll skip over to the express now and get the draft off, and you can mail the letter an hour later. So put your dust back in your pockets and help yourselves to the whiskey while I'm gone." He clapped his hat on his head and disappeared.

"There goes a white man, you bet!" said Fletcher admiringly, as the door closed behind their host. "Now, boys," he added, drawing a chair to the table, "let's get this yer letter off, and then go back to our game."

Pens and ink were produced, and an animated discussion ensued as to the matter to be conveyed. Daddy's plea for an extended explanatory and sympathetic communication was overruled, and the letter was written to Ricketts on the simple lines suggested by Falloner.

"But what about poor little Jim's letter?"

That ought to be answered," said Daddy pathetically.

"If Dick hurt his hand so he can't write to Ricketts, how in thunder is he goin' to write to Jim?" was the reply.

"But suthin' oughter be said to the poor kid," urged Daddy piteously.

"Well, write it yourself — you and Gus Houston make up somethin' together. I'm going to win some money," retorted Fletcher, returning to the card-table, where he was presently followed by all but Daddy and Houston.

"Ye can't write it in Dick's name, because that little brother knows Dick's handwriting, even if he don't remember his face. See?" suggested Houston.

"That's so," said Daddy dubiously; "but," he added, with elastic cheerfulness, "we can write that Dick 'says.' See?"

"Your head's level, old man! Just you wade in on that."

Daddy seized the pen and "waded in." Into somewhat deep and difficult water, I fancy, for some of it splashed into his eyes, and he sniffled once or twice as he wrote. "Suthin' like this," he said, after a pause: —

DEAR LITTLE JIMMIE, — Your big brother havin' hurt his hand, wants me to tell you that otherways he is all hunky and A1. He says he don't forget you and little Cissy, you bet! and he's sendin' money to old Ricketts straight off. He says don't you and Cissy mind whether school keeps or not as long as big Brother Dick holds the lines. He says he'd have written before, but he's bin follerin' up a lead mighty close, and expects to strike it rich in a few days.

“You ain't got no sabe about kids,” said Daddy imperturbably; “they've got to be humored like sick folks. And they want everythin' big — they don't take no stock in things ez they are — even ef they hev 'em worse than they are. ‘So,’” continued Daddy, reading to prevent further interruption, “‘he says you're just to keep your eyes skinned lookin' out for him comin' home any time — day or night. All you've got to do is to sit up and wait. He might come and even snake you out of your beds! He might come with four white horses and a nigger driver, or he might come disguised as an ornary tramp. Only you've got to be keen on watchin'.’ (Ye see,” inter-

rupted Daddy explanatorily, "that 'll jest keep them kids lively.) ' He says Cissy's to stop cryin' right off, and if Willie Walker hits yer on the right cheek you just slug out with your left fist, 'cordin' to Scriptor.' Gosh," ejaculated Daddy, stopping suddenly and gazing anxiously at Houston, "there 's that blamed photograph — I clean forgot that."

"And Dick has n't got one in the shop, and never had," returned Houston emphatically. "Golly! that stumps us! Unless," he added, with diabolical thoughtfulness, "we take Bob's? The kids don't remember Dick's face, and Bob 's about the same age. And it 's a regular star picture — you bet! Bob had it taken in Sacramento — in all his war paint. See!" He indicated a photograph pinned against the wall — a really striking likeness which did full justice to Bob's long silken mustache and large, brown determined eyes. "I 'll snake it off while they ain't lookin', and you jam it in the letter. Bob won't miss it, and we can fix it up with Dick after he 's well, and send another."

Daddy silently grasped the "infant's" hand, who presently secured the photograph

without attracting attention from the card-players. It was promptly inclosed in the letter, addressed to Master James Lasham. The "infant" started with it to the post-office, and Daddy Folsom returned to Lasham's cabin to relieve the watcher that had been detached from Falloner's to take his place beside the sick man.

Meanwhile the rain fell steadily and the shadows crept higher and higher up the mountain. Towards midnight the star points faded out one by one over Sawyer's Ledge even as they had come, with the difference that the illumination of Falloner's cabin was extinguished first, while the dim light of Lasham's increased in number. Later, two stars seemed to shoot from the centre of the ledge, trailing along the descent, until they were lost in the obscurity of the slope — the lights of the stage-coach to Sacramento carrying the mail and Robert Falloner. They met and passed two fainter lights toiling up the road — the buggy lights of the doctor, hastily summoned from Carterville to the bedside of the dying Dick Lasham.

The slowing up of his train caused Bob

Falloner to start from a half doze in a Western Pullman car. As he glanced from his window he could see that the blinding snowstorm which had followed him for the past six hours had at last hopelessly blocked the line. There was no prospect beyond the interminable snowy level, the whirling flakes, and the monotonous palisades of leafless trees seen through it to the distant banks of the Missouri. It was a prospect that the mountain-bred Falloner was beginning to loathe, and although it was scarcely six weeks since he left California, he was already looking back regretfully to the deep slopes and the free song of the serried ranks of pines.

The intense cold had chilled his temperate blood, even as the rigors and conventions of Eastern life had checked his sincerity and spontaneous flow of animal spirits begotten in the frank intercourse and brotherhood of camps. He had just fled from the artificialities of the great Atlantic cities to seek out some Western farming lands in which he might put his capital and energies. The unlooked-for interruption of his progress by a long-forgotten climate only deepened his discontent. And now — that train

was actually backing! It appeared they must return to the last station to wait for a snow-plough to clear the line. It was, explained the conductor, barely a mile from Shepherdstown, where there was a good hotel and a chance of breaking the journey for the night.

Shepherdstown! The name touched some dim chord in Bob Falloner's memory and conscience — yet one that was vague. Then he suddenly remembered that before leaving New York he had received a letter from Houston informing him of Lasham's death, reminding him of his previous bounty, and begging him — if he went West — to break the news to the Lasham family. There was also some allusion to a joke about his (Bob's) photograph, which he had dismissed as unimportant, and even now could not remember clearly. For a few moments his conscience pricked him that he should have forgotten it all, but now he could make amends by this providential delay. It was not a task to his liking; in any other circumstances he would have written, but he would not shirk it now.

Shepherdstown was on the main line of the Kansas Pacific Road, and as he alighted

at its station, the big through trains from San Francisco swept out of the stormy distance and stopped also. He remembered, as he mingled with the passengers, hearing a childish voice ask if this was the Californian train. He remembered hearing the amused and patient reply of the station-master: "Yes, sonny — here she is again, and here 's her passengers," as he got into the omnibus and drove to the hotel. Here he resolved to perform his disagreeable duty as quickly as possible, and on his way to his room stopped for a moment at the office to ask for Ricketts' address. The clerk, after a quick glance of curiosity at his new guest, gave it to him readily, with a somewhat familiar smile. It struck Falloner also as being odd that he had not been asked to write his name on the hotel register, but this was a saving of time he was not disposed to question, as he had already determined to make his visit to Ricketts at once, before dinner. It was still early evening.

He was washing his hands in his bedroom when there came a light tap at his sitting-room door. Falloner quickly resumed his coat and entered the sitting-room as the

porter ushered in a young lady holding a small boy by the hand. But, to Falloner's utter consternation, no sooner had the door closed on the servant than the boy, with a half-apologetic glance at the young lady, uttered a childish cry, broke from her, and calling, "Dick! Dick!" ran forward and leaped into Falloner's arms.

The mere shock of the onset and his own amazement left Bob without breath for words. The boy, with arms convulsively clasping his body, was imprinting kisses on Bob's waistcoat in default of reaching his face. At last Falloner managed gently but firmly to free himself, and turned a half-appealing, half-embarrassed look upon the young lady, whose own face, however, suddenly flushed pink. To add to the confusion, the boy, in some reaction of instinct, suddenly ran back to her, frantically clutched at her skirts, and tried to bury his head in their folds.

"He don't love me," he sobbed. "He don't care for me any more."

The face of the young girl changed. It was a pretty face in its flushing; in the paleness and thoughtfulness that overcast it it was a striking face, and Bob's attention

was for a moment distracted from the grotesqueness of the situation. Leaning over the boy she said in a caressing yet authoritative voice, "Run away for a moment, dear, until I call you," opening the door for him in a maternal way so inconsistent with the youthfulness of her figure that it struck him even in his confusion. There was something also in her dress and carriage that equally affected him: her garments were somewhat old-fashioned in style, yet of good material, with an odd incongruity to the climate and season.

Under her rough outer cloak she wore a polka jacket and the thinnest of summer blouses; and her hat, though dark, was of rough straw, plainly trimmed. Nevertheless, these peculiarities were carried off with an air of breeding and self-possession that was unmistakable. It was possible that her cool self-possession might have been due to some instinctive antagonism, for as she came a step forward with coldly and clearly-opened gray eyes, he was vaguely conscious that she did n't like him. Nevertheless, her manner was formally polite, even, as he fancied, to the point of irony, as she began, in a voice that occasionally

dropped into the lazy Southern intonation, and a speech that easily slipped at times into Southern dialect: —

“I sent the child out of the room, as I could see that his advances were annoying to you, and a good deal, I reckon, because I knew your reception of them was still more painful to him. It is quite natural, I dare say, you should feel as you do, and I reckon consistent with your attitude towards him. But you must make some allowance for the depth of his feelings, and how he has looked forward to this meeting. When I tell you that ever since he received your last letter, he and his sister — until her illness kept her home — have gone every day when the Pacific train was due to the station to meet you; that they have taken literally as Gospel truth every word of your letter ” —

“My letter?” interrupted Falloner.

The young girl's scarlet lip curled slightly. “I beg your pardon — I should have said the letter you dictated. Of course it was n't in your handwriting — you had hurt your hand, you know,” she added ironically. “At all events, they believed it all — that you were coming at any moment; they lived

in that belief, and the poor things went to the station with your photograph in their hands so that they might be the first to recognize and greet you."

"With my photograph?" interrupted Falloner again.

The young girl's clear eyes darkened ominously. "I reckon," she said deliberately, as she slowly drew from her pocket the photograph Daddy Folsom had sent, "that that is your photograph. It certainly seems an excellent likeness," she added, regarding him with a slight suggestion of contemptuous triumph.

In an instant the revelation of the whole mystery flashed upon him! The forgotten passage in Houston's letter about the stolen photograph stood clearly before him; the coincidence of his appearance in Shepherds-town, and the natural mistake of the children and their fair protector, were made perfectly plain. But with this relief and the certainty that he could confound her with an explanation came a certain mischievous desire to prolong the situation and increase his triumph. She certainly had not shown him any favor.

"Have you got the letter also?" he asked quietly.

She whisked it impatiently from her pocket and handed it to him. As he read Daddy's characteristic extravagance and recognized the familiar idiosyncrasies of his old companions, he was unable to restrain a smile. He raised his eyes, to meet with surprise the fair stranger's leveled eyebrows and brightly indignant eyes, in which, however, the rain was fast gathering with the lightning.

"It may be amusing to you, and I reckon likely it was all a California joke," she said with slightly trembling lips; "I don't know No'thern gentlemen and their ways, and you seem to have forgotten our ways as you have your kindred. Perhaps all this may seem so funny to them: it may not seem funny to that boy who is now crying his heart out in the hall; it may not be very amusing to that poor Cissy in her sick-bed longing to see her brother. It may be so far from amusing to her, that I should hesitate to bring you there in her excited condition and subject her to the pain that you have caused him. But I have promised her; she is already expecting us, and the disappointment may be dangerous, and I can only implore you — for a few moments

at least — to show a little more affection than you feel.” As he made an impulsive, deprecating gesture, yet without changing his look of restrained amusement, she stopped him hopelessly. “Oh, of course, yes, yes, I know it is years since you have seen them; they have no right to expect more; only — only — feeling as you do,” she burst impulsively, “why — oh, why did you come?”

Here was Bob's chance. He turned to her politely; began gravely, “I simply came to” — when suddenly his face changed; he stopped as if struck by a blow. His cheek flushed, and then paled! Good God! What had he come for? To tell them that this brother they were longing for — living for — perhaps even dying for — was dead! In his crass stupidity, his wounded vanity over the scorn of the young girl, his anticipation of triumph, he had forgotten — totally forgotten — what that triumph meant! Perhaps if he had felt more keenly the death of Lasham the thought of it would have been uppermost in his mind; but Lasham was not his partner or associate, only a brother miner, and his single act of generosity was in the ordi-

nary routine of camp life. If she could think him cold and heartless before, what would she think of him now? The absurdity of her mistake had vanished in the grim tragedy he had seemed to have cruelly prepared for her. The thought struck him so keenly that he stammered, faltered, and sank helplessly into a chair.

The shock that he had received was so plain to her that her own indignation went out in the breath of it. Her lip quivered. "Don't you mind," she said hurriedly, dropping into her Southern speech; "I didn't go to hurt you, but I was just that mad with the thought of those pickaninnies, and the easy way you took it, that I clean forgot I'd no call to catechise you! And you don't know me from the Queen of Sheba. Well," she went on, still more rapidly, and in odd distinction to her previous formal slow Southern delivery, "I'm the daughter of Colonel Boutelle, of Bayou Sara, Louisiana; and his paw, and his paw before him, had a plantation there since the time of Adam, but he lost it and six hundred niggers during the Wah! We were pooh as pohverty — paw and maw and we four girls — and no more idea of work than

a baby. But I had an education at the convent at New Orleans, and could play, and speak French, and I got a place as school-teacher here; I reckon the first Southern woman that has taught school in the No'th! Ricketts, who used to be our steward at Bayou Sara, told me about the pickaninnies, and how helpless they were, with only a brother who occasionally sent them money from California. I suppose I cottoned to the pooh little things at first because I knew what it was to be alone amongst strangers, Mr. Lasham; I used to teach them at odd times, and look after them, and go with them to the train to look for you. Perhaps Ricketts made me think you did n't care for them; perhaps I was wrong in thinking it was true, from the way you met Jimmy just now. But I've spoken my mind—and you know why." She ceased and walked to the window.

Falloner rose. The storm that had swept through him was over. The quick determination, resolute purpose, and infinite patience which had made him what he was were all there, and with it a conscientiousness which his selfish independence had hitherto kept dormant. He accepted the

situation, not passively — it was not in his nature — but threw himself into it with all his energy.

“You were quite right,” he said, halting a moment beside her; “I don’t blame you, and let me hope that later you may think me less to blame than you do now. Now, what’s to be done? Clearly, I’ve first to make it right with Tommy — I mean Jimmy — and then we must make a straight dash over to the girl! Whoop!” Before she could understand from his face the strange change in his voice, he had dashed out of the room. In a moment he reappeared with the boy struggling in his arms. “Think of the little scamp not knowing his own brother!” he laughed, giving the boy a really affectionate, if slightly exaggerated hug, “and expecting me to open my arms to the first little boy who jumps into them! I’ve a great mind not to give him the present I fetched all the way from California. Wait a moment.” He dashed into the bedroom, opened his valise — where he providentially remembered he had kept, with a miner’s superstition, the first little nugget of gold he had ever found — seized the tiny bit of quartz of gold, and dashed out again to display it before Jimmy’s eager eyes.

If the heartiness, sympathy, and charming kindness of the man's whole manner and face convinced, even while it slightly startled, the young girl, it was still more effective with the boy. Children are quick to detect the false ring of affected emotion, and Bob's was so genuine — whatever its cause — that it might have easily passed for a fraternal expression with harder critics. The child trustfully nestled against him and would have grasped the gold, but the young man whisked it into his pocket. "Not until we've shown it to our little sister — where we're going now! I'm off to order a sleigh." He dashed out again to the office as if he found some relief in action, or, as it seemed to Miss Boutelle, to avoid embarrassing conversation. When he came back again he was carrying an immense bearskin from his luggage. He cast a critical look at the girl's unseasonable attire."

"I shall wrap you and Jimmy in this — you know it's snowing frightfully."

Miss Boutelle flushed a little. "I'm warm enough when walking," she said coldly. Bob glanced at her smart little French shoes, and thought otherwise. He

said nothing, but hastily bundled his two guests downstairs and into the street. The whirlwind dance of the snow made the sleigh an indistinct bulk in the glittering darkness, and as the young girl for an instant stood dazedly still, Bob incontinently lifted her from her feet, deposited her in the vehicle, dropped Jimmy in her lap, and wrapped them both tightly in the bearskin. Her weight, which was scarcely more than a child's, struck him in that moment as being tantalizingly incongruous to the matronly severity of her manner and its strange effect upon him. He then jumped in himself, taking the direction from his companion, and drove off through the storm.

The wind and darkness were not favorable to conversation, and only once did he break the silence. "Is there any one who would be likely to remember — me — where we are going?" he asked, in a lull of the storm.

Miss Boutelle uncovered enough of her face to glance at him curiously. "Hardly! You know the children came here from the No'th after your mother's death, while you were in California."

"Of course," returned Bob hurriedly;

"I was only thinking—you know that some of my old friends might have called," and then collapsed into silence.

After a pause a voice came icily, although under the furs: "Perhaps you'd prefer that your arrival be kept secret from the public? But they seem to have already recognized you at the hotel from your inquiry about Ricketts, and the photograph Jimmy had already shown them two weeks ago." Bob remembered the clerk's familiar manner and the omission to ask him to register. "But it need go no further, if you like," she added, with a slight return of her previous scorn.

"I've no reason for keeping it secret," said Bob stoutly.

No other words were exchanged until the sleigh drew up before a plain wooden house in the suburbs of the town. Bob could see at a glance that it represented the income of some careful artisan or small shopkeeper, and that it promised little for an invalid's luxurious comfort. They were ushered into a chilly sitting-room, and Miss Boutelle ran upstairs with Jimmy to prepare the invalid for Bob's appearance. He noticed that a word dropped by the woman who opened

the door made the young girl's face grave again, and paled the color that the storm had buffeted to her cheek. He noticed also that these plain surroundings seemed only to enhance her own superiority, and that the woman treated her with a deference in odd contrast to the ill-concealed disfavor with which she regarded him. Strangely enough, this latter fact was a relief to his conscience. It would have been terrible to have received their kindness under false pretenses; to take their just blame of the man he personated seemed to mitigate the deceit.

The young girl rejoined him presently with troubled eyes. Cissy was worse, and only intermittently conscious, but had asked to see him. It was a short flight of stairs to the bedroom, but before he reached it Bob's heart beat faster than it had in any mountain climb. In one corner of the plainly furnished room stood a small truckle bed, and in it lay the invalid. It needed but a single glance at her flushed face in its aureole of yellow hair to recognize the likeness to Jimmy, although, added to that strange refinement produced by suffering, there was a spiritual exaltation in the child's

look — possibly from delirium — that awed and frightened him; an awful feeling that he could not lie to this hopeless creature took possession of him, and his step faltered. But she lifted her small arms pathetically towards him as if she divined his trouble, and he sank on his knees beside her. With a tiny finger curled around his long mustache, she lay there silent. Her face was full of trustfulness, happiness, and consciousness — but she spoke no word.

There was a pause, and Falloner, slightly lifting his head without disturbing that faintly clasping finger, beckoned Miss Boutelle to his side. "Can you drive?" he said, in a low voice.

"Yes."

"Take my sleigh and get the best doctor in town to come here at once. Bring him with you if you can; if he can't come at once, drive home yourself. I will stay here."

"But" — hesitated Miss Boutelle.

"I will stay here," he repeated.

The door closed on the young girl, and Falloner, still bending over the child, presently heard the sleigh-bells pass away in the storm. He still sat with his bent head,

held by the tiny clasp of those thin fingers. But the child's eyes were fixed so intently upon him that Mrs. Ricketts leaned over the strangely-assorted pair and said —

“It's your brother Dick, dearie. Don't you know him?”

The child's lips moved faintly. “Dick's dead,” she whispered.

“She's wandering,” said Mrs. Ricketts. “Speak to her.” But Bob, with his eyes on the child's, lifted a protesting hand. The little sufferer's lips moved again. “It is n't Dick — it's the angel God sent to tell me.”

She spoke no more. And when Miss Boutelle returned with the doctor she was beyond the reach of finite voices. Falloner would have remained all night with them, but he could see that his presence in the contracted household was not desired. Even his offer to take Jimmy with him to the hotel was declined, and at midnight he returned alone.

What his thoughts were that night may be easily imagined. Cissy's death had removed the only cause he had for concealing his real identity. There was nothing more to prevent his revealing all to Miss Boutelle

and to offer to adopt the boy. But he reflected this could not be done until after the funeral, for it was only due to Cissy's memory that he should still keep up the rôle of Dick Lasham as chief mourner. If it seems strange that Bob did not at this crucial moment take Miss Boutelle into his confidence, I fear it was because he dreaded the personal effect of the deceit he had practiced upon her more than any ethical consideration; she had softened considerably in her attitude towards him that night; he was human, after all, and while he felt his conduct had been unselfish in the main, he dared not confess to himself how much her opinion had influenced him. He resolved that after the funeral he would continue his journey, and write to her, *en route*, a full explanation of his conduct, inclosing Daddy's letter as corroborative evidence. But on searching his letter-case he found that he had lost even that evidence, and he must trust solely at present to her faith in his improbable story.

It seemed as if his greatest sacrifice was demanded at the funeral! For it could not be disguised that the neighbors were strongly prejudiced against him. Even the

preacher improved the occasion to warn the congregation against the dangers of putting off duty until too late. And when Robert Falloner, pale, but self-restrained, left the church with Miss Boutelle, equally pale and reserved, on his arm, he could with difficulty restrain his fury at the passing of a significant smile across the faces of a few curious bystanders. "It was Amy Boutelle, that was the 'penitence' that fetched him, you bet!" he overheard, a barely concealed whisper; and the reply, "And it's a good thing she's made out of it too, for he's mighty rich!"

At the church door he took her cold hand into his. "I am leaving to-morrow morning with Jimmy," he said, with a white face. "Good-by."

"You are quite right; good-by," she replied as briefly, but with the faintest color. He wondered if she had heard it too.

Whether she had heard it or not, she went home with Mrs. Ricketts in some righteous indignation, which found — after the young lady's habit — free expression. Whatever were Mr. Lasham's faults of omission it was most un-Christian to allude to them there, and an insult to the poor

little dear's memory who had forgiven them. Were she in his shoes she would shake the dust of the town off her feet; and she hoped he would. She was a little softened on arriving to find Jimmy in tears. He had lost Dick's photograph — or Dick had forgotten to give it back at the hotel, for this was all he had in his pocket. And he produced a letter — the missing letter of Daddy, which by mistake Falloner had handed back instead of the photograph. Miss Boutelle saw the superscription and Californian postmark with a vague curiosity.

“Did you look inside, dear? Perhaps it slipped in.”

Jimmy had not. Miss Boutelle did — and I grieve to say, ended by reading the whole letter.

Bob Falloner had finished packing his things the next morning, and was waiting for Mr. Ricketts and Jimmy. But when a tap came at the door, he opened it to find Miss Boutelle standing there. “I have sent Jimmy into the bedroom,” she said with a faint smile, “to look for the photograph which you gave him in mistake for this. I think for the present he prefers his brother's picture to this letter, which I have not ex-

plained to him or any one." She stopped, and raising her eyes to his, said gently: "I think it would have only been a part of your goodness to have trusted me, Mr. Falloner."

"Then you will forgive me?" he said eagerly.

She looked at him frankly, yet with a faint trace of coquetry that the angels might have pardoned. "Do you want me to say to you what Mrs. Ricketts says were the last words of poor Cissy?"

A year later, when the darkness and rain were creeping up Sawyer's Ledge, and Houston and Daddy Folsom were sitting before their brushwood fire in the old Lasham cabin, the latter delivered himself oracularly.

"It's a mighty queer thing, that news about Bob! It's not that he's married, for that might happen to any one; but this yer account in the paper of his wedding being attended by his 'little brother.' That gets me! To think all the while he was here he was lettin' on to us that he had n't kith or kin! Well, sir, that accounts to me for one thing, — the sing'ler way he tumbled to that letter of poor Dick Lasham's little brother and sent him that draft!

Don't ye see? It was a feller feelin'!
Knew how it was himself! I reckon ye
all thought I was kinder soft reading that
letter o' Dick Lasham's little brother to
him, but ye see what it did."

THE YOUNGEST MISS PIPER

I DO not think that any of us who enjoyed the acquaintance of the Piper girls or the hospitality of Judge Piper, their father, ever cared for the youngest sister. Not on account of her extreme youth, for the eldest Miss Piper confessed to twenty-six — and the youth of the youngest sister was established solely, I think, by one big braid down her back. Neither was it because she was the plainest, for the beauty of the Piper girls was a recognized general distinction, and the youngest Miss Piper was not entirely devoid of the family charms. Nor was it from any lack of intelligence, nor from any defective social quality; for her precocity was astounding, and her good-humored frankness alarming. Neither do I think it could be said that a slight deafness, which might impart an embarrassing publicity to any statement — the reverse of our general feeling — that might be confided by any one to her private ear, was a sufficient

reason; for it was pointed out that she always understood everything that Tom Sparrell told her in his ordinary tone of voice. Briefly, it was very possible that Delaware — the youngest Miss Piper — did not like us.

Yet it was fondly believed by us that the other sisters failed to show that indifference to our existence shown by Miss Delaware, although the heartburnings, misunderstandings, jealousies, hopes and fears, and finally the chivalrous resignation with which we at last accepted the long foregone conclusion that they were not for us, and far beyond our reach, is not a part of this veracious chronicle. Enough that none of the flirtations of her elder sisters affected or were shared by the youngest Miss Piper. She moved in this heart-breaking atmosphere with sublime indifference, treating her sisters' affairs with what we considered rank simplicity or appalling frankness. Their few admirers who were weak enough to attempt to gain her mediation or confidence had reason to regret it.

“It's no kind o' use givin' me goodies,” she said to a helpless suitor of Louisiana Piper's who had offered to bring her some sweets, “for I ain't got no influence with

Lu, and if I don't give 'em up to her when she hears of it, she'll nag me and hate you like pizen. Unless," she added thoughtfully, "it was wintergreen lozenges; Lu can't stand them, or anybody who eats them within a mile." It is needless to add that the miserable man, thus put upon his gallantry, was obliged in honor to provide Del with the wintergreen lozenges that kept him in disfavor and at a distance. Unfortunately, too, any predilection or pity for any particular suitor of her sister's was attended by even more disastrous consequences. It was reported that while acting as "gooseberry" — a rôle usually assigned to her — between Virginia Piper and an exceptionally timid young surveyor, during a ramble she conceived a rare sentiment of humanity towards the unhappy man. After once or twice lingering behind in the ostentatious picking of a wayside flower, or "running on ahead" to look at a mountain view, without any apparent effect on the shy and speechless youth, she decoyed him aside while her elder sister rambled indifferently and somewhat scornfully on. The youngest Miss Piper leaped upon the rail of a fence, and with the stalk of a thimbleberry

in her mouth swung her small feet to and fro and surveyed him dispassionately.

"Ye don't seem to be ketchin' on?" she said tentatively.

The young man smiled feebly and interrogatively.

"Don't seem to be either follering suit nor trumpin'," continued Del bluntly.

"I suppose so — that is, I fear that Miss Virginia" — he stammered.

"Speak up! I'm a little deaf. Say it again!" said Del, screwing up her eyes and eyebrows.

The young man was obliged to admit in stentorian tones that his progress had been scarcely satisfactory.

"You're goin' on too slow — that's it," said Del critically. "Why, when Captain Savage meandered along here with Jinny" (Virginia) "last week, afore we got as far as this he'd reeled off a heap of Byron and Jamieson" (Tennyson), "and sich; and only yesterday Jinny and Doctor Beveridge was blowin' thistletops to know which was a flirt all along the trail past the cross-roads. Why, ye ain't picked ez much as a single berry for Jinny, let alone Lad's Love or Johnny Jumpups and Kissme's,

and ye keep talkin' across me, you two, till I'm tired. Now look here," she burst out with sudden decision, "Jinny's gone on ahead in a kind o' huff; but I reckon she's done that afore too, and you'll find her, jest as Spinner did, on the rise of the hill, sittin' on a pine stump and lookin' like this." (Here the youngest Miss Piper locked her fingers over her left knee, and drew it slightly up, — with a sublime indifference to the exposure of considerable small-ankled red stocking, — and with a far-off, plaintive stare, achieved a colorable imitation of her elder sister's probable attitude.) "Then you jest go up softly, like as you was a bear, and clap your hands on her eyes, and say in a disguised voice like this" (here Del turned on a high falsetto beyond any masculine compass), "'Who's who?' jest like in forfeits."

"But she'll be sure to know me," said the surveyor timidly.

"She won't," said Del in scornful skepticism.

"I hardly think" — stammered the young man, with an awkward smile, "that I — in fact — she'll discover me — before I can get beside her."

“Not if you go softly, for she ’ll be sittin’ back to the road, so — gazing away, so” — the youngest Miss Piper again stared dreamily in the distance, “and you ’ll creep up just behind, like this.”

“But won’t she be angry? I have n’t known her long — that is — don’t you see?” He stopped embarrassedly.

“Can’t hear a word you say,” said Del, shaking her head decisively. “You ’ve got my deaf ear. Speak louder, or come closer.”

But here the instruction suddenly ended, once and for all time! For whether the young man was seriously anxious to perfect himself; whether he was truly grateful to the young girl and tried to show it; whether he was emboldened by the childish appeal of the long brown distinguishing braid down her back, or whether he suddenly found something peculiarly provocative in the reddish brown eyes between their thick-set hedge of lashes, and with the trim figure and piquant pose, and was seized with that hysteric desperation which sometimes attacks timidity itself, I cannot say! Enough that he suddenly put his arm around her waist and his lips to her soft satin cheek,

peppered and salted as it was by sun-freckles and mountain air, and received a sound box on the ear for his pains. The incident was closed. He did not repeat the experiment on either sister. The disclosure of his rebuff seemed, however, to give a singular satisfaction to Red Gulch.

While it may be gathered from this that the youngest Miss Piper was impervious to general masculine advances, it was not until later that Red Gulch was thrown into skeptical astonishment by the rumors that all this time she really had a lover! Allusion has been made to the charge that her deafness did not prevent her from perfectly understanding the ordinary tone of voice of a certain Mr. Thomas Sparrell.

No undue significance was attached to this fact through the very insignificance and "impossibility" of that individual;—a lanky, red-haired youth, incapacitated for manual labor through lameness,—a clerk in a general store at the Cross Roads! He had never been the recipient of Judge Piper's hospitality; he had never visited the house even with parcels; apparently his only interviews with her or any of the family had been over the counter. To do him jus-

tice he certainly had never seemed to seek any nearer acquaintance; he was not at the church door when her sisters, beautiful in their Sunday gowns, filed into the aisle, with little Delaware bringing up the rear; he was not at the Democratic barbecue, that we attended without reference to our personal politics, and solely for the sake of Judge Piper and the girls; nor did he go to the Agricultural Fair Ball—open to all. His abstention we believed to be owing to his lameness; to a wholesome consciousness of his own social defects; or an inordinate passion for reading cheap scientific textbooks, which did not, however, add fluency nor conviction to his speech. Neither had he the abstraction of a student, for his accounts were kept with an accuracy which struck us, who dealt at the store, as ignobly practical, and even malignant. Possibly we might have expressed this opinion more strongly but for a certain rude vigor of repartee which he possessed, and a suggestion that he might have a temper on occasion. "Them red-haired chaps is like to be tetchy and to kinder see blood through their eyelashes," had been suggested by an observing customer.

In short, little as we knew of the youngest Miss Piper, he was the last man we should have suspected her to select as an admirer. What we did know of their public relations, purely commercial ones, implied the reverse of any cordial understanding. The provisioning of the Piper household was entrusted to Del, with other practical odds and ends of housekeeping, not ornamental, and the following is said to be a truthful record of one of their overheard interviews at the store:—

The youngest Miss Piper, entering, displacing a quantity of goods in the centre to make a sideways seat for herself, and looking around loftily as she took a memorandum-book and pencil from her pocket.

“Ahem! If I ain’t taking you away from your studies, Mr. Sparrell, maybe you ’ll be good enough to look here a minit;—but” (in affected politeness) “if I ’m disturbing you I can come another time.”

Sparrell, placing the book he had been reading carefully under the counter, and advancing to Miss Delaware with a complete ignoring of her irony: “What can we do for you to-day, Miss Piper?”

Miss Delaware, with great suavity of

manner, examining her memorandum-book: "I suppose it would n't be shocking your delicate feelings too much to inform you that the canned lobster and oysters you sent us yesterday was n't fit for hogs?"

Sparrell (blandly): "They were n't intended for them, Miss Piper. If we had known you were having company over from Red Gulch to dinner, we might have provided something more suitable for them. We have a fair quality of oil-cake and corn-cobs in stock, at reduced figures. But the canned provisions were for your own family."

Miss Delaware (secretly pleased at this sarcastic allusion to her sister's friends, but concealing her delight): "I admire to hear you talk that way, Mr. Sparrell; it's better than minstrels or a circus. I suppose you get it out of that book," indicating the concealed volume. "What do you call it?"

Sparrell (politely): "The First Principles of Geology."

Miss Delaware, leaning sideways and curling her little fingers around her pink ear: "Did you say the first principles of 'geology' or 'politeness'? You know I

am so deaf; but, of course, it could n't be that."

Sparrell (easily): "Oh no, you seem to have that in your hand" — pointing to Miss Delaware's memorandum-book — "you were quoting from it when you came in."

Miss Delaware, after an affected silence of deep resignation: "Well! it's too bad folks can't just spend their lives listenin' to such elegant talk; I'd admire to do nothing else! But there's my family up at Cottonwood — and they must eat. They're that low that they expect me to waste my time getting food for 'em here, instead of drinking in the First Principles of the Grocery."

"Geology," suggested Sparrell blandly. "The history of rock formation."

"Geology," accepted Miss Delaware apologetically; "the history of rocks, which is so necessary for knowing just how much sand you can put in the sugar. So I reckon I'll leave my list here, and you can have the things toted to Cottonwood when you've got through with your First Principles."

She tore out a list of her commissions from a page of her memorandum-book, leaped lightly from the counter, threw her brown braid from her left shoulder to its

proper place down her back, shook out her skirts deliberately, and saying, "Thank you for a most improvin' afternoon, Mr. Sparrell," sailed demurely out of the store.

A few auditors of this narrative thought it inconsistent that a daughter of Judge Piper and a sister of the angelic host should put up with a mere clerk's familiarity, but it was pointed out that "she gave him as good as he sent," and the story was generally credited. But certainly no one ever dreamed that it pointed to any more precious confidences between them.

I think the secret burst upon the family, with other things, at the big picnic at Reservoir Cañon. This festivity had been arranged for weeks previously, and was undertaken chiefly by the "Red Gulch Contingent," as we were called, as a slight return to the Piper family for their frequent hospitality. The Piper sisters were expected to bring nothing but their own personal graces and attend to the ministration of such viands and delicacies as the boys had profusely supplied.

The site selected was Reservoir Cañon, a beautiful, triangular valley with very steep sides, one of which was crowned by the

immense reservoir of the Pioneer Ditch Company. The sheer flanks of the cañon descended in furrowed lines of vines and clinging bushes, like folds of falling skirts, until they broke again into frounces of spangled shrubbery over a broad level carpet of monkshood, mariposas, lupines, poppies, and daisies. Tempered and secluded from the sun's rays by its lofty shadows, the delicious obscurity of the cañon was in sharp contrast to the fiery mountain trail that in the full glare of the noonday sky made its tortuous way down the hillside, like a stream of lava, to plunge suddenly into the valley and extinguish itself in its coolness as in a lake. The heavy odors of wild honeysuckle, syringa, and ceanothus that hung over it were lightened and freshened by the sharp spicing of pine and bay. The mountain breeze which sometimes shook the serrated tops of the large redwoods above with a chill from the remote snow peaks even in the heart of summer, never reached the little valley.

It seemed an ideal place for a picnic. Everybody was therefore astonished to hear that an objection was suddenly raised to this perfect site. They were still more as-

tonished to know that the objector was the youngest Miss Piper! Pressed to give her reasons, she had replied that the locality was dangerous; that the reservoir placed upon the mountain, notoriously old and worn out, had been rendered more unsafe by false economy in unskillful and hasty repairs to satisfy speculating stockbrokers, and that it had lately shown signs of leakage and sapping of its outer walls; that, in the event of an outbreak, the little triangular valley, from which there was no outlet, would be instantly flooded. Asked still more pressingly to give her authority for these details, she at first hesitated, and then gave the name of Tom Sparrell.

The derision with which this statement was received by us all, as the opinion of a sedentary clerk, was quite natural and obvious, but not the anger which it excited in the breast of Judge Piper; for it was not generally known that the judge was the holder of a considerable number of shares in the Pioneer Ditch Company, and that large dividends had been lately kept up by a false economy of expenditure, to expedite a "sharp deal" in the stock, by which the judge and others could sell out of a failing

company. Rather, it was believed, that the judge's anger was due only to the discovery of Sparrell's influence over his daughter and his interference with the social affairs of Cottonwood. It was said that there was a sharp scene between the youngest Miss Piper and the combined forces of the judge and the elder sisters, which ended in the former's resolute refusal to attend the picnic at all if that site was selected.

As Delaware was known to be fearless even to the point of recklessness, and fond of gayety, her refusal only intensified the belief that she was merely "stickin' up for Sparrell's judgment" without any reference to her own personal safety or that of her sisters. The warning was laughed away; the opinion of Sparrell treated with ridicule as the dyspeptic and envious expression of an impractical man. It was pointed out that the reservoir had lasted a long time even in its alleged ruinous state; that only a miracle of coincidence could make it break down that particular afternoon of the picnic; that even if it did happen, there was no direct proof that it would seriously flood the valley, or at best add more than a spice of excitement to the affair. The "Red Gulch

Contingent," who *would* be there, was quite as capable of taking care of the ladies, in case of any accident, as any lame crank who would n't, but could only croak a warning to them from a distance. A few even wished something might happen that they might have an opportunity of showing their superior devotion; indeed, the prospect of carrying the half-submerged sisters, in a condition of helpless loveliness, in their arms to a place of safety was a fascinating possibility. The warning was conspicuously ineffective; everybody looked eagerly forward to the day and the unchanged locality; to the greatest hopefulness and anticipation was added the stirring of defiance, and when at last the appointed hour had arrived, the picnic party passed down the twisting mountain trail through the heat and glare in a fever of enthusiasm.

It was a pretty sight to view this sparkling procession — the girls cool and radiant in their white, blue, and yellow muslins and flying ribbons, the "Contingent" in its cleanest ducks, and blue and red flannel shirts, the judge white-waistcoated and panama-hatted, with a new dignity borrowed from the previous circumstances, and three

or four impressive Chinamen bringing up the rear with hampers — as it at last debouched into Reservoir Cañon.

Here they dispersed themselves over the limited area, scarcely half an acre, with the freedom of escaped school children. They were secure in their woodland privacy. They were overlooked by no high road and its passing teams; they were safe from accidental intrusion from the settlement; indeed they went so far as to effect the exclusiveness of "clique." At first they amused themselves by casting humorously defiant eyes at the long low Ditch Reservoir, which peeped over the green wall of the ridge, six hundred feet above them; at times they even simulated an exaggerated terror of it, and one recognized humorist declaimed a grotesque appeal to its forbearance, with delightful local allusions. Others pretended to discover near a woodman's hut, among the belt of pines at the top of the descending trail, the peeping figure of the ridiculous and envious Sparrell. But all this was presently forgotten in the actual festivity. Small as was the range of the valley, it still allowed retreats during the dances for waiting couples among the con-

venient laurel and manzanita bushes which flounced the mountain side. After the dancing, old-fashioned children's games were revived with great laughter and half-hearted and coy protests from the ladies; notably one pastime known as "I'm a-pin-in'," in which ingenious performance the victim was obliged to stand in the centre of a circle and publicly "pine" for a member of the opposite sex. Some hilarity was occasioned by the mischievous Miss "Georgy" Piper declaring, when it came to her turn, that she was "pinin'" for a look at the face of Tom Sparrell just now!

In this local trifling two hours passed, until the party sat down to the long-looked-for repast. It was here that the health of Judge Piper was neatly proposed by the editor of the "Argus." The judge responded with great dignity and some emotion. He reminded them that it had been his humble endeavor to promote harmony—that harmony so characteristic of American principles—in social as he had in political circles, and particularly among the strangely constituted yet purely American elements of frontier life. He accepted the present festivity with its overflowing hospitalities,

not in recognition of himself — (“yes! yes!”) — nor of his family — (enthusiastic protests) — but of that American principle! If at one time it seemed probable that these festivities might be marred by the machinations of envy — (groans) — or that harmony interrupted by the importation of low-toned material interests — (groans) — he could say that, looking around him, he had never before felt — er — that — Here the judge stopped short, reeled slightly forward, caught at a camp-stool, recovered himself with an apologetic smile, and turned inquiringly to his neighbor.

A light laugh — instantly suppressed — at what was at first supposed to be the effect of the “overflowing hospitality” upon the speaker himself, went around the male circle until it suddenly appeared that half a dozen others had started to their feet at the same time, with white faces, and that one of the ladies had screamed.

“What is it?” everybody was asking with interrogatory smiles.

It was Judge Piper who replied: —

“A little shock of earthquake,” he said blandly; “a mere thrill! I think,” he added with a faint smile, “we may say that Nature

herself has applauded our efforts in good old Californian fashion, and signified her assent. What are you saying, Fludder?"

"I was thinking, sir," said Fludder deferentially, in a lower voice, "that if anything was wrong in the reservoir, this shock, you know, might" —

He was interrupted by a faint crashing and crackling sound, and looking up, beheld a good-sized boulder, evidently detached from some greater height, strike the upland plateau at the left of the trail and bound into the fringe of forest beside it. A slight cloud of dust marked its course, and then lazily floated away in mid air. But it had been watched agitatedly, and it was evident that that singular loss of nervous balance which is apt to affect all those who go through the slightest earthquake experience was felt by all. But some sense of humor, however, remained.

"Looks as if the water risks we took ain't goin' to cover earthquakes," drawled Dick Frisney; "still that was n't a bad shot, if we only knew what they were aiming at."

"Do be quiet," said Virginia Piper, her cheeks pink with excitement. "Listen,

can't you? What's that funny murmuring you hear now and then up there?"

"It's only the snow-wind playin' with the pines on the summit. You girls won't allow anybody any fun but yourselves."

But here a scream from "Georgy," who, assisted by Captain Fairfax, had mounted a camp-stool at the mouth of the valley, attracted everybody's attention. She was standing upright, with dilated eyes, staring at the top of the trail. "Look!" she said excitedly, "if the trail is n't moving!"

Everybody faced in that direction. At the first glance it seemed indeed as if the trail was actually moving; wriggling and undulating its tortuous way down the mountain like a huge snake, only swollen to twice its usual size. But the second glance showed it to be no longer a trail but a channel of water, whose stream, lifted in a bore-like wall four or five feet high, was plunging down into the devoted valley.

For an instant they were unable to comprehend even the nature of the catastrophe. The reservoir was directly over their heads; the bursting of its wall they had imagined would naturally bring down the water in a dozen trickling streams, or falls over the

cliff above them and along the flanks of the mountain. But that its suddenly liberated volume should overflow the upland beyond and then descend in a pent-up flood by their own trail and their only avenue of escape, had been beyond their wildest fancy.

They met this smiting truth with that characteristic short laugh with which the American usually receives the blow of Fate or the unexpected — as if he recognized only the absurdity of the situation. Then they ran to the women, collected them together, and dragged them to vantages of fancied security among the bushes which flounced the long skirts of the mountain walls. But I leave this part of the description to the characteristic language of one of the party:—

“When the flood struck us, it did not seem to take any stock of us in particular, but laid itself out to ‘go for’ that picnic for all it was worth! It wiped it off the face of the earth in about twenty-five seconds! It first made a clean break from stem to stern, carrying everything along with it. The first thing I saw was old Judge Piper, puttin’ on his best licks to

get away from a big can of strawberry ice cream that was trundling after him and trying to empty itself on his collar, whenever a bigger wave lifted it. He was followed by what was left of the brass band; the big drum just humpin' itself to keep abreast o' the ice cream, mixed up with camp-stools, music-stands, a few Chinamen, and then what they call in them big San Francisco processions 'citizens generally.' The hull thing swept up the cañon inside o' thirty seconds. Then, what Captain Fairfax called 'the reflex action in the laws o' motion' happened, and darned if the hull blamed procession did n't sweep back again — this time all the heavy artillery, such as camp-kettles, lager beer kegs, bottles, glasses, and crockery that was left behind takin' the lead now, and Judge Piper and that ice cream can bringin' up the rear. As the jedge passed us the second time, we noticed that that ice cream can — hevin' swallowed water — was kinder losing its wind, and we encouraged the old man by shoutin' out, 'Five to one on him!' And then, you would n't believe what followed. Why, darn my skin, when that 'reflex' met the current at the other end, it just swirled

around again in what Captain Fairfax called the 'centrifugal curve,' and just went round and round the cañon like ez when yer washin' the dirt out o' a prospect-in' pan — every now and then washin' some one of the boys that was in it, like scum, up ag'in the banks.

"We managed in this way to snake out the judge, jest ez he was sailin' round on the home stretch, passin' the quarter post two lengths ahead o' the can. A good deal o' the ice cream had washed away, but it took us ten minutes to shake the cracked ice and powdered salt out o' the old man's clothes, and warm him up again in the laurel bush where he was clinging. This sort o' 'Here we go round the mulberry bush' kep' on until most o' the humans was got out, and only the furniture o' the picnic was left in the race. Then it got kinder mixed up, and went sloshin' round here and there, ez the water kep' comin' down by the trail. Then Lulu Piper, what I was holdin' up all the time in a laurel bush, gets an idea, for all she was wet and draggled; and ez the things went bobbin' round, she calls out the figures o' a cotillon to 'em. 'Two camp-stools forward.' 'Sa-

shay and back to your places.' 'Change partners.' 'Hands all round.'

"She was clear grit, you bet! And the joke caught on and the other girls jined in, and it kinder cheered 'em, for they was wantin' it. Then Fludder allowed to pacify 'em by sayin' he just figured up the size o' the reservoir and the size o' the cañon, and he kalkilated that the cube was about ekal, and the cañon could n't flood any more. And then Lulu — who was peart as a jay and could n't be fooled — speaks up and says, 'What's the matter with the ditch, Dick?'

"Lord! then we knew that she knew the worst; for of course all the water in the ditch itself — fifty miles of it! — was drainin' now into that reservoir and was bound to come down to the cañon."

It was at this point that the situation became really desperate, for they had now crawled up the steep sides as far as the bushes afforded foothold, and the water was still rising. The chatter of the girls ceased, there were long silences, in which the men discussed the wildest plans, and proposed to tear their shirts into strips to make ropes to support the girls by sticks driven into the

mountain side. It was in one of those intervals that the distinct strokes of a woodman's axe were heard high on the upland at the point where the trail descended to the cañon. Every ear was alert, but only those on one side of the cañon could get a fair view of the spot. This was the good fortune of Captain Fairfax and Georgy Piper, who had climbed to the highest bush on that side, and were now standing up, gazing excitedly in that direction.

"Some one is cutting down a tree at the head of the trail," shouted Fairfax. The response and joyful explanation, "for a dam across the trail," was on everybody's lips at the same time.

But the strokes of the axe were slow and painfully intermittent. Impatience burst out.

"Yell to him to hurry up! Why have n't they brought two men?"

"It's only one man," shouted the captain, "and he seems to be a cripple. By Jiminy! — it is — yes! — it's Tom Sparrell!"

There was a dead silence. Then, I grieve to say, shame and its twin brother rage took possession of their weak humanity. Oh,

yes! It was all of a piece! Why in the name of Folly had n't he sent for an able-bodied man. Were they to be drowned through his cranky obstinacy?

The blows still went on slowly. Presently, however, they seemed to alternate with other blows — but alas! they were slower, and if possible feebler!

“Have they got another cripple to work?” roared the Contingent in one furious voice.

“No — it's a woman — a little one — yes! a girl. Hello! Why, sure as you live, it's Delaware!”

A spontaneous cheer burst from the Contingent, partly as a rebuke to Sparrell, I think, partly from some shame over their previous rage. He could take it as he liked.

Still the blows went on distressingly slow. The girls were hoisted on the men's shoulders; the men were half submerged. Then there was a painful pause; then a crumbling crash. Another cheer went up from the cañon.

“It's down! straight across the trail,” shouted Fairfax, “and a part of the bank on the top of it.”

There was another moment of suspense.

Would it hold or be carried away by the momentum of the flood? It held! In a few moments Fairfax again gave voice to the cheering news that the flow had stopped and the submerged trail was reappearing. In twenty minutes it was clear — a muddy river bed, but possible of ascent! Of course there was no diminution of the water in the cañon, which had no outlet, yet it now was possible for the party to swing from bush to bush along the mountain side until the foot of the trail — no longer an opposing one — was reached. There were some missteps and mishaps, — flounderings in the water, and some dangerous rescues, — but in half an hour the whole concourse stood upon the trail and commenced the ascent. It was a slow, difficult, and lugubrious procession — I fear not the best-tempered one, now that the stimulus of danger and chivalry was past. When they reached the dam made by the fallen tree, although they were obliged to make a long detour to avoid its steep sides, they could see how successfully it had diverted the current to a declivity on the other side.

But strangely enough they were greeted by nothing else! Sparrell and the youngest

Miss Piper were gone; and when they at last reached the highroad, they were astounded to hear from a passing teamster that no one in the settlement knew anything of the disaster!

This was the last drop in their cup of bitterness! They who had expected that the settlement was waiting breathlessly for their rescue, who anticipated that they would be welcomed as heroes, were obliged to meet the ill-concealed amusement of passengers and friends at their dishevelled and bedraggled appearance, which suggested only the blundering mishaps of an ordinary summer outing! "Boatin' in the reservoir, and fell in?" "Playing at canal-boat in the Ditch?" were some of the cheerful hypotheses. The fleeting sense of gratitude they had felt for their deliverers was dissipated by the time they had reached their homes, and their rancor increased by the information that when the earthquake occurred Mr. Tom Sparrell and Miss Delaware were enjoying a "pasear" in the forest — he having a half-holiday by virtue of the festival — and that the earthquake had revived his fears of a catastrophe. The two had procured axes in the woodman's

hut and did what they thought was necessary to relieve the situation of the picnickers. But the very modesty of this account of their own performance had the effect of belittling the catastrophe itself, and the picnickers' report of their exceeding peril was received with incredulous laughter.

For the first time in the history of Red Gulch there was a serious division between the Piper family, supported by the Continent, and the rest of the settlement. Tom Sparrell's warning was remembered by the latter, and the ingratitude of the picnickers to their rescuers commented upon; the actual calamity to the reservoir was more or less attributed to the imprudent and reckless contiguity of the revelers on that day, and there were not wanting those who referred the accident itself to the machinations of the scheming Ditch Director Piper!

It was said that there was a stormy scene in the Piper household that evening. The judge had demanded that Delaware should break off her acquaintance with Sparrell, and she had refused; the judge had demanded of Sparrell's employer that he should discharge him, and had been met with the astounding information that Spar-

rell was already a silent partner in the concern. At this revelation Judge Piper was alarmed; while he might object to a clerk who could not support a wife, as a consistent democrat he could not oppose a fairly prosperous tradesman. A final appeal was made to Delaware; she was implored to consider the situation of her sisters, who had all made more ambitious marriages or were about to make them. Why should she now degrade the family by marrying a country storekeeper?

It is said that here the youngest Miss Piper made a memorable reply, and a revelation the truth of which was never gainsaid:—

“You all wanter know why I ’m going to marry Tom Sparrell?” she queried, standing up and facing the whole family circle.

“Yes.”

“Why I prefer him to the hull caboodle that you girls have married or are going to marry?” she continued, meditatively biting the end of her braid.

“Yes.”

“Well, he ’s the only man of the whole lot that has n’t proposed to me first.”

It is presumed that Sparrell made good

the omission, or that the family were glad to get rid of her, for they were married that autumn. And really a later comparison of the family records shows that while Captain Fairfax remained "Captain Fairfax," and the other sons-in-law did not advance proportionately in standing or riches, the lame storekeeper of Red Gulch became the Hon. Senator Tom Sparrell.

A WIDOW OF THE SANTA ANA VALLEY

THE Widow Wade was standing at her bedroom window staring out, in that vague instinct which compels humanity in moments of doubt and perplexity to seek this change of observation or superior illumination. Not that Mrs. Wade's disturbance was of a serious character. She had passed the acute stage of widowhood by at least two years, and the slight redness of her soft eyelids as well as the droop of her pretty mouth were merely the recognized outward and visible signs of the grievously minded religious community in which she lived. The mourning she still wore was also partly in conformity with the sad-colored garments of her neighbors, and the necessities of the rainy season. She was in comfortable circumstances, the mistress of a large ranch in the valley, which had lately become more valuable by the extension of a wagon road through its centre. She was simply worrying whether she should go to a "sociable"

ending with "a dance" — a daring innovation of some strangers — at the new hotel, or continue to eschew such follies, that were, according to local belief, unsuited to "a vale of tears."

Indeed at this moment the prospect she gazed abstractedly upon seemed to justify that lugubrious description. The Santa Ana Valley — a long monotonous level — was dimly visible through moving curtains of rain or veils of mist, to the black mourning edge of the horizon, and had looked like that for months. The valley — in some remote epoch an arm of the San Francisco Bay — every rainy season seemed to be trying to revert to its original condition, and, long after the early spring had laid on its liberal color in strips, bands, and patches of blue and yellow, the blossoms of mustard and lupine glistened like wet paint. Nevertheless on that rich alluvial soil Nature's tears seemed only to fatten the widow's acres and increase her crops. Her neighbors, too, were equally prosperous. Yet for six months of the year the recognized expression of Santa Ana was one of sadness, and for the other six months — of resignation. Mrs. Wade had yielded early to this

influence, as she had to others, in the weakness of her gentle nature, and partly as it was more becoming the singular tragedy that had made her a widow.

The late Mr. Wade had been found dead with a bullet through his head in a secluded part of the road over Heavy Tree Hill in Sonora County. Near him lay two other bodies, one afterwards identified as John Stubbs, a resident of the Hill, and probably a traveling companion of Wade's, and the other a noted desperado and highwayman, still masked, as at the moment of the attack. Wade and his companion had probably sold their lives dearly, and against odds, for another mask was found on the ground, indicating that the attack was not single-handed, and as Wade's body had not yet been rifled, it was evident that the remaining highwayman had fled in haste. The hue and cry had been given by apparently the only one of the travelers who escaped, but as he was hastening to take the overland coach to the East at the time, his testimony could not be submitted to the coroner's deliberation. The facts, however, were sufficiently plain for a verdict of willful murder against the highwayman, al-

though it was believed that the absent witness had basely deserted his companion and left him to his fate, or, as was suggested by others, that he might even have been an accomplice. It was this circumstance which protracted comment on the incident, and the sufferings of the widow, far beyond that rapid obliteration which usually overtook such affairs in the feverish haste of the early days. It caused her to remove to Santa Ana, where her old father had feebly ranched a "quarter section" in the valley. He survived her husband only a few months, leaving her the property, and once more in mourning. Perhaps this continuity of woe endeared her to a neighborhood where distinctive ravages of diphtheria or scarlet fever gave a kind of social preëminence to any household, and she was so sympathetically assisted by her neighbors in the management of the ranch that, from an unkempt and wasteful wilderness, it became paying property. The slim, willowy figure, soft red-lidded eyes, and deep crape of "Sister Wade" at church or prayer-meeting was grateful to the soul of these gloomy worshippers, and in time she herself found that the arm of these dyspeptics of mind

and body was nevertheless strong and sustaining. Small wonder that she should hesitate to-night about plunging into inconsistent, even though trifling, frivolities.

But apart from this superficial reason, there was another instinctive one deep down in the recesses of Mrs. Wade's timid heart which she had kept to herself, and indeed would have tearfully resented had it been offered by another. The late Mr. Wade had been, in fact, a singular example of this kind of frivolous existence carried to a man-like excess. Besides being a patron of amusements, Mr. Wade gambled, raced, and drank. He was often home late, and sometimes not at all. Not that this conduct was exceptional in the "roaring days" of Heavy Tree Hill, but it had given Mrs. Wade perhaps an undue preference for a less certain, even if a more serious life. His tragic death was, of course, a kind of martyrdom, which exalted him in the feminine mind to a saintly memory; yet Mrs. Wade was not without a certain relief in that. It was voiced, perhaps crudely, by the widow of Abner Drake in a visit of condolence to the tearful Mrs. Wade a few days after Wade's death. "It's a vale o'

sorrow, Mrs. Wade," said the sympathizer, "but it has its ups and downs, and I reckon ye 'll be feelin' soon pretty much as I did about Abner when *he* was took. It was mighty soothin' and comfortin' to feel that whatever might happen now, I always knew just whar Abner was passin' his nights." Poor slim Mrs. Wade had no disquieting sense of humor to interfere with her reception of this large truth, and she accepted it with a burst of reminiscent tears.

A long volleying shower had just passed down the level landscape, and was followed by a rolling mist from the warm saturated soil like the smoke of the discharge. Through it she could see a faint lightening of the hidden sun, again darkening through a sudden onset of rain, and changing as with her conflicting doubts and resolutions. Thus gazing, she was vaguely conscious of an addition to the landscape in the shape of a man who was passing down the road with a pack on his back like the tramping "prospectors" she had often seen at Heavy Tree Hill. That memory apparently settled her vacillating mind; she determined she would *not* go to the dance. But as she was turning away from the window a second

figure, a horseman, appeared in another direction by a cross-road, a shorter cut through her domain. This she had no difficulty in recognizing as one of the strangers who were getting up the dance. She had noticed him at church on the previous Sunday. As he passed the house he appeared to be gazing at it so earnestly that she drew back from the window lest she should be seen. And then, for no reason whatever, she changed her mind once more, and resolved to go to the dance. Gravely announcing this fact to the wife of her superintendent who kept house with her in her loneliness, she thought nothing more about it. She should go in her mourning, with perhaps the addition of a white collar and frill.

It was evident, however, that Santa Ana thought a good deal more than she did of this new idea, which seemed a part of the innovation already begun by the building up of the new hotel. It was argued by some that as the new church and new school-house had been opened by prayer, it was only natural that a lighter festivity should inaugurate the opening of the hotel. "I reckon that dancin' is about the next thing

to travelin' for gettin' up an appetite for refreshments, and that 's what the landlord is kalkilatin' to sarve," was the remark of a gloomy but practical citizen on the veranda of "The Valley Emporium." "That 's so," rejoined a bystander; "and I notice on that last box o' pills I got for chills the directions say that a little 'agreeable exercise' — not too violent — is a great assistance to the working o' the pills."

"I reckon that that Mr. Brooks who's down here lookin' arter mill property, got up the dance. He's bin round town canvassin' all the women folks and drummin' up likely gals for it. They say he actooally sent an invite to the Widder Wade," remarked another lounge. "Gosh! he's got cheek!"

"Well, gentlemen," said the proprietor judicially, "while we don't intend to hev any minin' camp fandangos or 'Frisco falals round Santa Any — (Santa Ana was proud of its simple agricultural virtues) — I ain't so hard-shelled as not to give new things a fair trial. And, after all, it's the women folk that has the say about it. Why, there's old Miss Ford sez she has n't kicked a fut sence she left Mizoori, but

wouldn't mind trying it agin. Ez to Brooks takin' that trouble — well, I suppose it's along o' his bein' *healthy!*" He heaved a deep dyspeptic sigh, which was faintly echoed by the others. "Why, look at him now, ridin' round on that black hoss o' his, in the wet since daylight and not carin' for blind chills or rhumatiz!"

He was looking at a serape-draped horseman, the one the widow had seen on the previous night, who was now cantering slowly up the street. Seeing the group on the veranda, he rode up, threw himself lightly from his saddle, and joined them. He was an alert, determined, good-looking fellow of about thirty-five, whose smooth, smiling face hardly commended itself to Santa Ana, though his eyes were distinctly sympathetic. He glanced at the depressed group around him and became ominously serious.

"When did it happen?" he asked gravely.

"What happen?" said the nearest bystander.

"The Funeral, Flood, Fight, or Fire. Which of the four F's was it?"

"What are ye talkin' about?" said the

proprietor stiffly, scenting some dangerous humor.

"*You*," said Brooks promptly. "You're all standing here, croaking like crows, this fine morning. I passed *your* farm, Johnson, not an hour ago; the wheat just climbing out of the black adobe mud as thick as rows of pins on paper — what have *you* to grumble at? I saw *your* stock, Briggs, over on Two-Mile Bottom, waddling along, fat as the adobe they were sticking in, their coats shining like fresh paint — what's the matter with *you*? And," turning to the proprietor, "there's *your* shed, Saunders, over on the creek, just bursting with last year's grain that you know has gone up two hundred per cent. since you bought it at a bargain — what are *you* growling at? It's enough to provoke a fire or a famine to hear you groaning — and take care it don't, some day, as a lesson to you."

All this was so perfectly true of the prosperous burghers that they could not for a moment reply. But Briggs had recourse to what he believed to be a retaliatory taunt.

"I heard you've been askin' Widow Wade to come to your dance," he said, with a wink at the others. "Of course she said 'Yes.'"

"Of course she did," returned Brooks coolly. "I've just got her note."

"What?" ejaculated the three men together. "Mrs. Wade comin'?"

"Certainly! Why should n't she? And it would do *you* good to come too, and shake the limp dampness out o' you," returned Brooks, as he quietly remounted his horse and cantered away.

"Darned ef I don't think he's got his eye on the widder," said Johnson faintly.

"Or the quarter section," added Briggs gloomily.

For all that, the eventful evening came, with many lights in the staring, undraped windows of the hotel, coldly bright bunting on the still damp walls of the long dining-room, and a gentle downpour from the hidden skies above. A close carryall was especially selected to bring Mrs. Wade and her housekeeper. The widow arrived, looking a little slimmer than usual in her closely buttoned black dress, white collar and cuffs, very glistening in eye and in hair, — whose glossy black ringlets were perhaps more elaborately arranged than was her custom, — and with a faint coming and going of color, due perhaps to her agitation at this

tentative reëntering into worldly life, which was nevertheless quite virginal in effect. A vague solemnity pervaded the introductory proceedings, and a singular want of sociability was visible in the "sociable" part of the entertainment. People talked in whispers or with that grave precision which indicates good manners in rural communities; conversed painfully with other people whom they did not want to talk to rather than appear to be alone, or rushed aimlessly together like water drops, and then floated in broken, adherent masses over the floor. The widow became a helpless, religious centre of deacons and Sunday-school teachers, which Brooks, untiring, yet fruitless, in his attempt to produce gayety, tried in vain to break. To this gloom the untried dangers of the impending dance, duly prefigured by a lonely cottage piano and two violins in a desert of expanse, added a nervous chill. When at last the music struck up — somewhat hesitatingly and protestingly, from the circumstance that the player was the church organist, and fumbled mechanically for his stops, the attempt to make up a cotillon set was left to the heroic Brooks. Yet he barely escaped disaster

when, in posing the couples, he incautiously begged them to look a little less as if they were waiting for the coffin to be borne down the aisle between them, and was rewarded by a burst of tears from Mrs. Johnson, who had lost a child two years before, and who had to be led away, while her place in the set was taken by another. Yet the cotillon passed off; a Spanish dance succeeded; "Moneyusk," with the Virginia Reel, put a slight intoxicating vibration into the air, and healthy youth at last asserted itself in a score of freckled but buxom girls in white muslin, with romping figures and laughter, at the lower end of the room. Still a rigid decorum reigned among the elder dancers, and the figures were called out in grave formality, as if, to Brooks's fancy, they were hymns given from the pulpit, until at the close of the set, in half-real, half-mock despair, he turned desperately to Mrs. Wade, his partner: —

"Do you waltz?"

Mrs. Wade hesitated. She *had*, before marriage, and was a good waltzer. "I do," she said timidly, "but do you think they" —

But before the poor widow could formulate her fears as to the reception of "round

dances," Brooks had darted to the piano, and the next moment she heard with a "fearful joy" the opening bars of a waltz. It was an old Julien waltz, fresh still in the fifties, daring, provocative to foot, swamping to intellect, arresting to judgment, irresistible, supreme! Before Mrs. Wade could protest, Brooks's arm had gathered up her slim figure, and with one quick backward sweep and swirl they were off! The floor was cleared for them in a sudden bewilderment of alarm—a suspense of burning curiosity. The widow's little feet tripped quickly, her long black skirt swung out; as she turned the corner there was not only a sudden revelation of her pretty ankles, but, what was more startling, a dazzling flash of frilled and laced petticoat, which at once convinced every woman in the room that the act had been premeditated for days! Yet even that criticism was presently forgotten in the pervading intoxication of the music and the movement. The younger people fell into it with wild romps, whirlings, and clasping of hands and waists. And stranger than all, a corybantic enthusiasm seized upon the emotionally religious, and those priests and priestesses

of Cybele who were famous for their frenzy and passion in camp-meeting devotions seemed to find an equal expression that night in the waltz. And when, flushed and panting, Mrs. Wade at last halted on the arm of her partner, they were nearly knocked over by the revolving Johnson and Mrs. Stubbs in a whirl of gloomy exultation! Deacons and Sunday-school teachers waltzed together until the long room shook, and the very bunting on the walls waved and fluttered with the gyrations of those religious dervishes. Nobody knew — nobody cared how long this frenzy lasted — it ceased only with the collapse of the musicians. Then, with much vague bewilderment, inward trepidation, awkward and incoherent partings, everybody went dazedly home; there was no other dancing after that — the waltz was the one event of the festival and of the history of Santa Ana. And later that night, when the timid Mrs. Wade, in the seclusion of her own room and the disrobing of her slim figure, glanced at her spotless frilled and laced petticoat lying on a chair, a faint smile — the first of her widowhood — curved the corners of her pretty mouth.

A week of ominous silence regarding the festival succeeded in Santa Ana. The local paper gave the fullest particulars of the opening of the hotel, but contented itself with saying: "The entertainment concluded with a dance." Mr. Brooks, who felt himself compelled to call upon his late charming partner twice during the week, characteristically soothed her anxieties as to the result. "The fact of it is, Mrs. Wade, there's really nobody in particular to blame — and that's what gets them. They're all mixed up in it, deacons and Sunday-school teachers; and when old Johnson tried to be nasty the other evening and hoped you hadn't suffered from your exertions that night, I told him you hadn't quite recovered yet from the physical shock of having been run into by him and Mrs. Stubbs, but that, you being a lady, you didn't tell just how you felt at the exhibition he and she made of themselves. That shut him up."

"But you should n't have said that," said Mrs. Wade with a frightened little smile.

"No matter," returned Brooks cheerfully. "I'll take the blame of it with the others. You see they'll have to have a scapegoat — and I'm just the man, for I got up the

dance! And as I'm going away, I suppose I shall bear off the sin with me into the wilderness."

"You're going away?" repeated Mrs. Wade in more genuine concern.

"Not for long," returned Brooks laughingly. "I came here to look up a mill site, and I've found it. Meantime I think I've opened their eyes."

"You have opened mine," said the widow with timid frankness.

They were soft pretty eyes when opened, in spite of their heavy red lids, and Mr. Brooks thought that Santa Ana would be no worse if they remained open. Possibly he looked it, for Mrs. Wade said hurriedly, "I mean—that is—I've been thinking that life need n't *always* be as gloomy as we make it here. And even *here*, you know, Mr. Brooks, we have six months' sunshine—though we always forget it in the rainy season."

"That's so," said Brooks cheerfully. "I once lost a heap of money through my own foolishness, and I've managed to forget it, and I even reckon to get it back again out of Santa Ana if my mill speculation holds good. So good-by, Mrs. Wade—but not

for long." He shook her hand frankly and departed, leaving the widow conscious of a certain sympathetic confidence and a little grateful for — she knew not what.

This feeling remained with her most of the afternoon, and even imparted a certain gayety to her spirits, to the extent of causing her to hum softly to herself; the air being oddly enough the Julien Waltz. And when, later in the day, the shadows were closing in with the rain, word was brought to her that a stranger wished to see her in the sitting-room, she carried a less mournful mind to this function of her existence. For Mrs. Wade was accustomed to give audience to traveling agents, tradesmen, working-hands and servants, as chatelaine of her ranch, and the occasion was not novel. Yet on entering the room, which she used partly as an office, she found some difficulty in classifying the stranger, who at first glance reminded her of the tramping miner she had seen that night from her window. He was rather incongruously dressed, some articles of his apparel being finer than others; he wore a diamond pin in a scarf folded over a rough "hickory" shirt; his light trousers were tucked in common min-

ing boots that bore stains of travel and a suggestion that he had slept in his clothes. What she could see of his unshaven face in that uncertain light expressed a kind of dogged concentration, overlaid by an assumption of ease. He got up as she came in, and with a slight "How do, ma'am," shut the door behind her and glanced furtively around the room.

"What I've got to say to ye, Mrs. Wade, — as I reckon you be, — is strictly private and confidential! Why, ye'll see afore I get through. But I thought I might just as well caution ye agin our being disturbed."

Overcoming a slight instinct of repulsion, Mrs. Wade returned, "You can speak to me here; no one will interrupt you — unless I call them," she added with a little feminine caution.

"And I reckon ye won't do that," he said with a grim smile. "You are the widow o' Pulaski Wade, late o' Heavy Tree Hill, I reckon?"

"I am," said Mrs. Wade.

"And your husband's buried up thar in the graveyard, with a monument over him setting forth his virtues ez a Christian and a square man and a high-minded citizen?"

And that he was foully murdered by highwaymen?"

"Yes," said Mrs. Wade, "that is the inscription."

"Well, ma'am, a bigger pack o' lies never was cut on stone!"

Mrs. Wade rose, half in indignation, half in terror.

"Keep your sittin'," said the stranger, with a warning wave of his hand. "Wait till I'm through, and then you call in the hull State o' Californy, ef ye want."

The stranger's manner was so doggedly confident that Mrs. Wade sank back tremblingly in her chair. The man put his slouch hat on his knee, twirled it round once or twice, and then said with the same stubborn deliberation:—

"The highwayman in that business was your husband—Pulaski Wade—and his gang, and he was killed by one o' the men he was robbin'. Ye see, ma'am, it used to be your husband's little game to rope in three or four strangers in a poker deal at Spanish Jim's saloon—I see you've heard o' the place," he interpolated as Mrs. Wade drew back suddenly—"and when he could n't clean 'em out in that way, or they

showed a little more money than they played, he'd lay for 'em with his gang in a lone part of the trail, and go through them like any road agent. That's what he did that night—and that's how he got killed."

"How do you know this?" said Mrs. Wade, with quivering lips.

"I was one o' the men he went through before he was killed. And I'd hev got my money back, but the rest o' the gang came up, and I got away jest in time to save my life and nothin' else. Ye might remember thar was one man got away and giv' the alarm, but he was goin' on to the States by the overland coach that night and could n't stay to be a witness. *I* was that man. I had paid my passage through, and I could n't lose *that* too with my other money, so I went."

Mrs. Wade sat stunned. She remembered the missing witness, and how she had longed to see the man who was last with her husband; she remembered Spanish Jim's saloon—his well-known haunt; his frequent and unaccountable absences, the sudden influx of money which he always said he had won at cards; the diamond ring

he had given her as the result of "a bet;" the forgotten recurrence of other robberies by a secret masked gang; a hundred other things that had worried her, instinctively, vaguely. She knew now, too, the meaning of the unrest that had driven her from Heavy Tree Hill—the strange unformulated fears that had haunted her even here. Yet with all this she felt, too, her present weakness—knew that this man had taken her at a disadvantage, that she ought to indignantly assert herself, deny everything, demand proof, and brand him a slanderer!

"How did — you — know it was my husband?" she stammered.

"His mask fell off in the fight; you know another mask was found — it was *his*. I saw him as plainly as I see him there!" he pointed to a daguerreotype of her husband which stood upon her desk.

Mrs. Wade could only stare vacantly, hopelessly. After a pause the man continued in a less aggressive manner and more confidential tone, which, however, only increased her terror. "I ain't sayin' that *you* knowed anything about this, ma'am, and whatever other folks might say when *they* know of it, I'll allers say that you did n't."

“What, then, did you come here for?” said the widow desperately.

“What do I come here for?” repeated the man grimly, looking around the room; “what did I come to this yer comfortable home — this yer big ranch and to a rich woman like yourself for? Well, Mrs. Wade, I come to get the six hundred dollars your husband robbed me of, that’s all! I ain’t askin’ more! I ain’t askin’ interest! I ain’t askin’ compensation for havin’ to run for my life — and,” again looking grimly round the walls, “I ain’t askin’ more than you will give — or is my rights.”

“But this house never was his; it was my father’s,” gasped Mrs. Wade; “you have no right” —

“Mebbe ‘yes’ and mebbe ‘no,’ Mrs. Wade,” interrupted the man, with a wave of his hat; “but how about them two checks to bearer for two hundred dollars each found among your husband’s effects, and collected by your lawyer for you — *my checks*, Mrs. Wade?”

A wave of dreadful recollection overwhelmed her. She remembered the checks found upon her husband’s body, known only to her and her lawyer, believed to be gam-

bling gains, and collected at once under his legal advice. Yet she made one more desperate effort in spite of the instinct that told her he was speaking the truth.

"But you shall have to prove it — before witnesses."

"Do you *want* me to prove it before witnesses?" said the man, coming nearer her. "Do you want to take my word and keep it between ourselves, or do you want to call in your superintendent and his men, and all Santy Any, to hear me prove your husband was a highwayman, thief, and murderer? Do you want to knock over that monument on Heavy Tree Hill, and upset your standing here among the deacons and elders? Do you want to do all this and be forced, even by your neighbors, to pay me in the end, as you will? Ef you do, call in your witnesses now and let 's have it over. Mebbe it would look better ef I got the money out of *your friends* than ye — a woman! P'raps you 're right!"

He made a step towards the door, but she stopped him.

"No! no! wait! It's a large sum — I have n't it with me," she stammered, thoroughly beaten.

"Ye kin get it."

"Give me time!" she implored. "Look! I'll give you a hundred down now, — all I have here, — the rest another time!" She nervously opened a drawer of her desk and taking out a buckskin bag of gold thrust it in his hand. "There! go away now!" She lifted her thin hands despairingly to her head. "Go! do!"

The man seemed struck by her manner. "I don't want to be hard on a woman," he said slowly. "I'll go now and come back again at nine to-night. You can git the money, or what's as good, a check to bearer, by then. And ef ye'll take my advice, you won't ask no advice from others, ef you want to keep your secret. Just now it's safe with me; I'm a square man, ef I seem to be a hard one." He made a gesture as if to take her hand, but as she drew shrinkingly away, he changed it to an awkward bow, and the next moment was gone.

She started to her feet, but the unwonted strain upon her nerves and frail body had been greater than she knew. She made a step forward, felt the room whirl round her and then seem to collapse beneath her

feet, and, clutching at her chair, sank back into it, fainting.

How long she lay there she never knew. She was at last conscious of some one bending over her, and a voice—the voice of Mr. Brooks—in her ear, saying, “I beg your pardon; you seem ill. Shall I call some one?”

“No!” she gasped, quickly recovering herself with an effort, and staring round her. “Where is—when did you come in?”

“Only this moment. I was leaving to-night, sooner than I expected, and thought I’d say good-by. They told me that you had been engaged with a stranger, but he had just gone. I beg your pardon—I see you are ill. I won’t detain you any longer.”

“No! no! don’t go! I am better—better,” she said feverishly. As she glanced at his strong and sympathetic face a wild idea seized her. He was a stranger here, an alien to these people, like herself. The advice that she dare not seek from others, from her half-estranged religious friends, from even her superintendent and his wife, dare she ask from him? Perhaps he saw

this frightened doubt, this imploring appeal, in her eyes, for he said gently, "Is it anything I can do for you?"

"Yes," she said, with the sudden desperation of weakness; "I want you to keep a secret."

"Yours? — yes!" he said promptly.

Whereat poor Mrs. Wade instantly burst into tears. Then, amidst her sobs, she told him of the stranger's visit, of his terrible accusations, of his demands, his expected return, and her own utter helplessness. To her terror, as she went on she saw a singular change in his kind face; he was following her with hard, eager intensity. She had half hoped, even through her fateful instincts, that he might have laughed, man-like, at her fears, or pooh-poohed the whole thing. But he did not. "You say he positively recognized your husband?" he repeated quickly.

"Yes, yes!" sobbed the widow, "and knew that daguerreotype!" she pointed to the desk.

Brooks turned quickly in that direction. Luckily his back was towards her, and she could not see his face, and the quick, startled look that came into his eyes. But when

they again met hers, it was gone, and even their eager intensity had changed to a gentle commiseration. "You have only his word for it, Mrs. Wade," he said gently, "and in telling your secret to another, you have shorn the rascal of half his power over you. And he knew it. Now, dismiss the matter from your mind and leave it all to me. I will be here a few minutes before nine — *and alone in this room*. Let your visitor be shown in here, and don't let us be disturbed. Don't be alarmed," he added with a faint twinkle in his eye, "there will be no fuss and no exposure!"

It lacked a few minutes of nine when Mr. Brooks was ushered into the sitting-room. As soon as he was alone he quietly examined the door and the windows, and having satisfied himself, took his seat in a chair casually placed behind the door. Presently he heard the sound of voices and a heavy footstep in the passage. He lightly felt his waistcoat pocket — it contained a pretty little weapon of power and precision, with a barrel scarcely two inches long.

The door opened, and the person outside entered the room. In an instant Brooks

had shut the door and locked it behind him. The man turned fiercely, but was faced by Brooks quietly, with one finger calmly hooked in his waistcoat pocket. The man slightly recoiled from him—not as much from fear as from some vague stupefaction. “What’s that for? What’s your little game?” he said half contemptuously.

“No game at all,” returned Brooks coolly. “You came here to sell a secret. I don’t propose to have it given away first to any listener.”

“You don’t— who are *you*?”

“That’s a queer question to ask of the man you are trying to personate—but I don’t wonder! You’re doing it d—d badly.”

“Personate—*you*?” said the stranger, with staring eyes.

“Yes, *me*,” said Brooks quietly. “I am the only man who escaped from the robbery that night at Heavy Tree Hill and who went home by the Overland Coach.”

The stranger stared, but recovered himself with a coarse laugh. “Oh, well! we’re on the same lay, it appears! Both after the widow— afore we show up her husband.”

"Not exactly," said Brooks, with his eyes fixed intently on the stranger. "You are here to denounce a highwayman who is *dead* and escaped justice. I am here to denounce one who is *living*! — Stop! drop your hand; it's no use. You thought you had to deal only with a woman to-night, and your revolver is n't quite handy enough. There! down! — down! So! That 'll do."

"You can't prove it," said the man hoarsely.

"Fool! In your story to that woman you have given yourself away. There were but two travelers attacked by the highwaymen. One was killed — I am the other. Where do *you* come in? What witness can you be — except as the highwayman that you are? Who is left to identify Wade but — his accomplice!"

The man's suddenly whitened face made his unshaven beard seem to bristle over his face like some wild animal's. "Well, ef you kalkilate to blow me, you've got to blow Wade and his widder too. Jest you remember that," he said whiningly.

"I've thought of that," said Brooks coolly, "and I calculate that to prevent it is worth about that hundred dollars you got

from that poor woman — and no more! Now, sit down at that table, and write as I dictate.”

The man looked at him in wonder, but obeyed.

“Write,” said Brooks, “I hereby certify that my accusations against the late Pulaski Wade of Heavy Tree Hill are erroneous and groundless, and the result of mistaken identity, especially in regard to any complicity of his in the robbery of John Stubbs, deceased, and Henry Brooks, at Heavy Tree Hill, on the night of the 13th August, 1854.”

The man looked up with a repulsive smile. “Who’s the fool now, Cap’n? What’s become of your hold on the widder, now?”

“Write!” said Brooks fiercely.

The sound of a pen hurriedly scratching paper followed this first outburst of the quiet Brooks.

“Sign it,” said Brooks.

The man signed it.

“Now go,” said Brooks, unlocking the door, “but remember, if you should ever be inclined to revisit Santa Ana, you will find *me* living here also.”

The man slunk out of the door and into

the passage like a wild animal returning to the night and darkness. Brooks took up the paper, rejoined Mrs. Wade in the parlor, and laid it before her.

"But," said the widow, trembling even in her joy, "do you — do you think he was *really* mistaken?"

"Positive," said Brooks coolly. "It's true, it's a mistake that has cost you a hundred dollars, but there are some mistakes that are worth that to be kept quiet."

They were married a year later; but there is no record that in after years of conjugal relations with a weak, charming, but sometimes trying woman, Henry Brooks was ever tempted to tell her the whole truth of the robbery of Heavy Tree Hill.

THE MERMAID OF LIGHTHOUSE POINT

SOME forty years ago, on the northern coast of California, near the Golden Gate, stood a lighthouse. Of a primitive class, since superseded by a building more in keeping with the growing magnitude of the adjacent port, it attracted little attention from the desolate shore, and, it was alleged, still less from the desolate sea beyond. A gray structure of timber, stone, and glass, it was buffeted and harried by the constant trade winds, baked by the unclouded six months' sun, lost for a few hours in the afternoon sea-fog, and laughed over by circling guillemots from the Farallones. It was kept by a recluse — a preoccupied man of scientific tastes, who, in shameless contrast to his fellow immigrants, had applied to the government for this scarcely lucrative position as a means of securing the seclusion he valued more than gold. Some believed that he was the victim of an early disappointment in love — a view charitably

taken by those who also believed that the government would not have appointed "a crank" to a position of responsibility. Howbeit, he fulfilled his duties, and, with the assistance of an Indian, even cultivated a small patch of ground beside the lighthouse. His isolation was complete! There was little to attract wanderers here: the nearest mines were fifty miles away; the virgin forest on the mountains inland were penetrated only by sawmills and woodmen from the Bay settlements, equally remote. Although by the shore-line the lights of the great port were sometimes plainly visible, yet the solitude around him was peopled only by Indians, — a branch of the great northern tribe of "root-diggers," — peaceful and simple in their habits, as yet undisturbed by the white man, nor stirred into antagonism by aggression. Civilization only touched him at stated intervals, and then by the more expeditious sea from the government boat that brought him supplies. But for his contiguity to the perpetual turmoil of wind and sea, he might have passed a restful Arcadian life in his surroundings; for even his solitude was sometimes haunted by this faint reminder of the great port

hard by that pulsated with an equal unrest. Nevertheless, the sands before his door and the rocks behind him seemed to have been untrodden by any other white man's foot since their upheaval from the ocean. It was true that the little bay beside him was marked on the map as "Sir Francis Drake's Bay," tradition having located it as the spot where that ingenious pirate and empire-maker had once landed his vessels and scraped the barnacles from his adventurous keels. But of this Edgar Pomfrey — or "Captain Pomfrey," as he was called by virtue of his half-nautical office — had thought little.

For the first six months he had thoroughly enjoyed his seclusion. In the company of his books, of which he had brought such a fair store that their shelves lined his snug corners to the exclusion of more comfortable furniture, he found his principal recreation. Even his unwonted manual labor, the trimming of his lamp and cleaning of his reflectors, and his personal housekeeping, in which his Indian help at times assisted, he found a novel and interesting occupation. For outdoor exercise, a ramble on the sands, a climb to the rocky upland, or a pull in

the lighthouse boat, amply sufficed him. "Crank" as he was supposed to be, he was sane enough to guard against any of those early lapses into barbarism which marked the lives of some solitary gold-miners. His own taste, as well as the duty of his office, kept his person and habitation sweet and clean, and his habits regular. Even the little cultivated patch of ground on the lee side of the tower was symmetrical and well ordered. Thus the outward light of Captain Pomfrey shone forth over the wilderness of shore and wave, even like his beacon, whatever his inward illumination may have been.

It was a bright summer morning, remarkable even in the monotonous excellence of the season, with a slight touch of warmth which the invincible Northwest Trades had not yet chilled. There was still a faint haze off the coast, as if last night's fog had been caught in the quick sunshine, and the shining sands were hot, but without the usual dazzling glare. A faint perfume from a quaint lilac-colored beach-flower, whose clustering heads dotted the sand like bits of blown spume, took the place of that smell of the sea which the odorless Pacific

lacked. A few rocks, half a mile away, lifted themselves above the ebb tide at varying heights as they lay on the trough of the swell, were crested with foam by a striking surge, or cleanly erased in the full sweep of the sea. Beside, and partly upon one of the higher rocks, a singular object was moving.

Pomfrey was interested but not startled. He had once or twice seen seals disporting on these rocks, and on one occasion a sea-lion, — an estray from the familiar rocks on the other side of the Golden Gate. But he ceased work in his garden patch, and coming to his house, exchanged his hoe for a telescope. When he got the mystery in focus he suddenly stopped and rubbed the object-glass with his handkerchief. But even when he applied the glass to his eye for a second time, he could scarcely believe his eyesight. For the object seemed to be a *woman*, the lower part of her figure submerged in the sea, her long hair depending over her shoulders and waist. There was nothing in her attitude to suggest terror or that she was the victim of some accident. She moved slowly and complacently with the sea, and even — a more staggering sug-

gestion — appeared to be combing out the strands of her long hair with her fingers. With her body half concealed she might have been a mermaid!

He swept the foreshore and horizon with his glass; there was neither boat nor ship — nor anything that moved, except the long swell of the Pacific. She could have come only from the sea; for to reach the rocks by land she would have had to pass before the lighthouse, while the narrow strip of shore which curved northward beyond his range of view he knew was inhabited only by Indians. But the woman was unhesitatingly and appallingly *white*, and her hair light even to a golden gleam in the sunshine.

Pomfrey was a gentleman, and as such was amazed, dismayed, and cruelly embarrassed. If she was a simple bather from some vicinity hitherto unknown and unsuspected by him, it was clearly his business to shut up his glass and go back to his garden patch — although the propinquity of himself and the lighthouse must have been as plainly visible to her as she was to him. On the other hand, if she was the survivor of some wreck and in distress — or, as he

even fancied from her reckless manner, bereft of her senses, his duty to rescue her was equally clear. In his dilemma he determined upon a compromise and ran to his boat. He would pull out to sea, pass between the rocks and the curving sand-spit, and examine the sands and sea more closely for signs of wreckage, or some overlooked waiting boat near the shore. He would be within hail if she needed him, or she could escape to her boat if she had one.

In another moment his boat was lifting on the swell towards the rocks. He pulled quickly, occasionally turning to note that the strange figure, whose movements were quite discernible to the naked eye, was still there, but gazing more earnestly towards the nearest shore for any sign of life or occupation. In ten minutes he had reached the curve where the trend opened northward, and the long line of shore stretched before him. He swept it eagerly with a single searching glance. Sea and shore were empty. He turned quickly to the rock, scarcely a hundred yards on his beam. It was empty too! Forgetting his previous scruples, he pulled directly for it until his keel grated on its submerged base. There

was nothing there but the rock, slippery with the yellow-green slime of seaweed and kelp—neither trace nor sign of the figure that had occupied it a moment ago. He pulled around it; there was no cleft or hiding-place. For an instant his heart leaped at the sight of something white, caught in a jagged tooth of the outlying reef, but it was only the bleached fragment of a bamboo orange-crate, cast from the deck of some South Sea trader, such as often strewed the beach. He lay off the rock, keeping way in the swell, and scrutinizing the glittering sea. At last he pulled back to the lighthouse, perplexed and discomfited.

Was it simply a sporting seal, transformed by some trick of his vision? But he had seen it through his glass, and now remembered such details as the face and features framed in their contour of golden hair, and believed he could even have identified them. He examined the rock again with his glass, and was surprised to see how clearly it was outlined now in its barren loneliness. Yet he must have been mistaken. His scientific and accurate mind allowed of no errant fancy, and he had al-

ways sneered at the marvelous as the result of hasty or superficial observation. He was a little worried at this lapse of his healthy accuracy, — fearing that it might be the result of his seclusion and loneliness, — akin to the visions of the recluse and solitary. It was strange, too, that it should take the shape of a woman; for Edgar Pomfrey had a story — the usual old and foolish one.

Then his thoughts took a lighter phase, and he turned to the memory of his books, and finally to the books themselves. From a shelf he picked out a volume of old voyages, and turned to a remembered passage: “In other seas doe abound marvellis soche as Sea Spydres of the bigness of a pinnace, the wich they have been known to attack and destroy; Sea Vypers which reach to the top of a goodly maste, whereby they are able to draw mariners from the rigging by the suction of their breathes; and Devill Fyshe, which vomit fire by night which makyth the sea to shine prodigiously, and mermaydes. They are half fyshe and half mayde of grate Beauty, and have been seen of divers godly and creditable witnesses swymming beside rocks, hidden to their

waist in the sea, combing of their hayres, to the help of whych they carry a small mirrore of the bigness of their fingers." Pomfrey laid the book aside with a faint smile. To even this credulity he might come!

Nevertheless, he used the telescope again that day. But there was no repetition of the incident, and he was forced to believe that he had been the victim of some extraordinary illusion. The next morning, however, with his calmer judgment doubts began to visit him. There was no one of whom he could make inquiries but his Indian helper, and their conversation had usually been restricted to the language of signs or the use of a few words he had picked up. He contrived, however, to ask if there was a "waugee" (white) woman in the neighborhood. The Indian shook his head in surprise. There was no "waugee" nearer than the remote mountain-ridge to which he pointed. Pomfrey was obliged to be content with this. Even had his vocabulary been larger, he would as soon have thought of revealing the embarrassing secret of this woman, whom he believed to be of his own race, to a mere barbarian as he

would of asking him to verify his own impressions by allowing him to look at her that morning. The next day, however, something happened which forced him to resume his inquiries. He was rowing around the curving spot when he saw a number of black objects on the northern sands moving in and out of the surf, which he presently made out as Indians. A nearer approach satisfied him that they were wading squaws and children gathering seaweed and shells. He would have pushed his acquaintance still nearer, but as his boat rounded the point, with one accord they all scuttled away like frightened sandpipers. Pomfrey, on his return, asked his Indian retainèr if they could swim. "Oh, yes!" "As far as the rock?" "Yes." Yet Pomfrey was not satisfied. The color of his strange apparition remained unaccounted for, and it was not that of an Indian woman.

Trifling events linger long in a monotonous existence, and it was nearly a week before Pomfrey gave up his daily telescopic inspection of the rock. Then he fell back upon his books again, and, oddly enough, upon another volume of voyages, and so chanced upon the account of Sir Francis

Drake's occupation of the bay before him. He had always thought it strange that the great adventurer had left no trace or sign of his sojourn there; still stranger that he should have overlooked the presence of gold, known even to the Indians themselves, and have lost a discovery far beyond his wildest dreams and a treasure to which the cargoes of those Philippine galleons he had more or less successfully intercepted were trifles. Had the restless explorer been content to pace those dreary sands during three weeks of inactivity, with no thought of penetrating the inland forests behind the range, or of even entering the nobler bay beyond? Or was the location of the spot a mere tradition as wild and unsupported as the "marvells" of the other volume? Pomfrey had the skepticism of the scientific, inquiring mind.

Two weeks had passed and he was returning from a long climb inland, when he stopped to rest in his descent to the sea. The panorama of the shore was before him, from its uttermost limit to the lighthouse on the northern point. The sun was still one hour high, it would take him about that time to reach home. But from this coign

of vantage he could see — what he had not before observed — that what he had always believed was a little cove on the northern shore was really the estuary of a small stream which rose near him and eventually descended into the ocean at that point. He could also see that beside it was a long low erection of some kind, covered with thatched brush, which looked like a “barrow,” yet showed signs of habitation in the slight smoke that rose from it and drifted inland. It was not far out of his way, and he resolved to return in that direction. On his way down he once or twice heard the barking of an Indian dog, and knew that he must be in the vicinity of an encampment. A camp-fire, with the ashes yet warm, proved that he was on the trail of one of the nomadic tribes, but the declining sun warned him to hasten home to his duty. When he at last reached the estuary, he found that the building beside it was little else than a long hut, whose thatched and mud-plastered mound-like roof gave it the appearance of a cave. Its single opening and entrance abutted on the water’s edge, and the smoke he had noticed rolled through this entrance from a smouldering fire within.

Pomfrey had little difficulty in recognizing the purpose of this strange structure from the accounts he had heard from "loggers" of the Indian customs. The cave was a "sweat-house" — a calorific chamber in which the Indians closely shut themselves, naked, with a "smudge" or smouldering fire of leaves, until, perspiring and half suffocated, they rushed from the entrance and threw themselves into the water before it. The still smouldering fire told him that the house had been used that morning, and he made no doubt that the Indians were encamped near by. He would have liked to pursue his researches further, but he found he had already trespassed upon his remaining time, and he turned somewhat abruptly away — so abruptly, in fact, that a figure, which had evidently been cautiously following him at a distance, had not time to get away. His heart leaped with astonishment. It was the woman he had seen on the rock.

Although her native dress now only disclosed her head and hands, there was no doubt about her color, and it was distinctly white, save for the tanning of exposure and a slight red ochre marking on her low forehead. And her hair, long and unkempt as

it was, showed that he had not erred in his first impression of it. It was a tawny flaxen, with fainter bleachings where the sun had touched it most. Her eyes were of a clear Northern blue. Her dress, which was quite distinctive in that it was neither the cast off finery of civilization nor the cheap "government" flannels and calicoes usually worn by the Californian tribes, was purely native, and of fringed deerskin, and consisted of a long, loose shirt and leggings worked with bright feathers and colored shells. A necklace, also of shells and fancy pebbles, hung round her neck. She seemed to be a fully developed woman, in spite of the girlishness of her flowing hair, and notwithstanding the shapeless length of her gaberdine-like garment, taller than the ordinary squaw.

Pomfrey saw all this in a single flash of perception, for the next instant she was gone, disappearing behind the sweat-house. He ran after her, catching sight of her again, half doubled up, in the characteristic Indian trot, dodging around rocks and low bushes as she fled along the banks of the stream. But for her distinguishing hair, she looked in her flight like an ordi-

nary frightened squaw. This, which gave a sense of unmanliness and ridicule to his own pursuit of her, with the fact that his hour of duty was drawing near and he was still far from the lighthouse, checked him in full career, and he turned regretfully away. He had called after her at first, and she had not heeded him. What he would have said to her he did not know. He hastened home discomfited, even embarrassed — yet excited to a degree he had not deemed possible in himself.

During the morning his thoughts were full of her. Theory after theory for her strange existence there he examined and dismissed. His first thought, that she was a white woman — some settler's wife — masquerading in Indian garb, he abandoned when he saw her moving; no white woman could imitate that Indian trot, nor would remember to attempt it if she were frightened. The idea that she was a captive white, held by the Indians, became ridiculous when he thought of the nearness of civilization and the peaceful, timid character of the "digger" tribes. That she was some unfortunate demented creature who had escaped from her keeper and wandered

into the wilderness, a glance at her clear, frank, intelligent, curious eyes had contradicted. There was but one theory left—the most sensible and practical one—that she was the offspring of some white man and Indian squaw. Yet this he found, oddly enough, the least palatable to his fancy. And the few half-breeds he had seen were not at all like her.

The next morning he had recourse to his Indian retainer, "Jim." With infinite difficulty, protraction, and not a little embarrassment, he finally made him understand that he had seen a "white squaw" near the "sweat-house," and that he wanted to know more about her. With equal difficulty Jim finally recognized the fact of the existence of such a person, but immediately afterwards shook his head in an emphatic negation. With greater difficulty and greater mortification Pomfrey presently ascertained that Jim's negative referred to a supposed abduction of the woman which he understood that his employer seriously contemplated. But he also learned that she was a real Indian, and that there were three or four others like her, male and female, in that vicinity; that from a "skeena

mowitch" (little baby) they were all like that, and that their parents were of the same color, but never a white or "waugee" man or woman among them; that they were looked upon as a distinct and superior caste of Indians, and enjoyed certain privileges with the tribe; that they superstitiously avoided white men, of whom they had the greatest fear, and that they were protected in this by the other Indians; that it was marvelous and almost beyond belief that Pomfrey had been able to see one, for no other white man had, or was even aware of their existence.

How much of this he actually understood, how much of it was lying and due to Jim's belief that he wished to abduct the fair stranger, Pomfrey was unable to determine. There was enough, however, to excite his curiosity strongly and occupy his mind to the exclusion of his books—save one. Among his smaller volumes he had found a travel book of the "Chinook Jargon," with a lexicon of many of the words commonly used by the Northern Pacific tribes. An hour or two's trial with the astonished Jim gave him an increased vocabulary and a new occupation. Each day the incon-

gruous pair took a lesson from the lexicon. In a week Pomfrey felt he would be able to accost the mysterious stranger. But he did not again surprise her in any of his rambles, or even in a later visit to the sweat-house. He had learned from Jim that the house was only used by the "bucks," or males, and that her appearance there had been accidental. He recalled that he had had the impression that she had been stealthily following him, and the recollection gave him a pleasure he could not account for. But an incident presently occurred which gave him a new idea of her relations towards him.

The difficulty of making Jim understand had hitherto prevented Pomfrey from intrusting him with the care of the lantern; but with the aid of the lexicon he had been able to make him comprehend its working, and under Pomfrey's personal guidance the Indian had once or twice lit the lamp and set its machinery in motion. It remained for him only to test Jim's unaided capacity, in case of his own absence or illness. It happened to be a warm, beautiful sunset, when the afternoon fog had for once delayed its invasion of the shore-line, that he

left the lighthouse to Jim's undivided care, and reclining on a sand-dune still warm from the sun, lazily watched the result of Jim's first essay. As the twilight deepened, and the first flash of the lantern strove with the dying glories of the sun, Pomfrey presently became aware that he was not the only watcher. A little gray figure creeping on all fours suddenly glided out of the shadow of another sand-dune and then halted, falling back on its knees, gazing fixedly at the growing light. It was the woman he had seen. She was not a dozen yards away, and in her eagerness and utter absorption in the light had evidently overlooked him. He could see her face distinctly, her lips parted half in wonder, half with the breathless absorption of a devotee. A faint sense of disappointment came over him. It was not *him* she was watching, but the light! As it swelled out over the darkening gray sand she turned as if to watch its effect around her, and caught sight of Pomfrey. With a little startled cry — the first she had uttered — she darted away. He did not follow. A moment before, when he first saw her, an Indian salutation which he had learned from Jim had

risen to his lips, but in the odd feeling which her fascination of the light had caused him he had not spoken. He watched her bent figure scuttling away like some frightened animal, with a critical consciousness that she was really scarce human, and went back to the lighthouse. He would not run after her again! Yet that evening he continued to think of her, and recalled her voice, which struck him now as having been at once melodious and childlike, and wished he had at least spoken, and perhaps elicited a reply.

He did not, however, haunt the sweat-house near the river again. Yet he still continued his lessons with Jim, and in this way, perhaps, although quite unpremeditatedly, enlisted a humble ally. A week passed in which he had not alluded to her, when one morning, as he was returning from a row, Jim met him mysteriously on the beach.

"S'pose him come slow, slow," said Jim gravely, airing his newly acquired English; "make no noise — plenty catchee Indian maiden." The last epithet was the polite lexicon equivalent of squaw.

Pomfrey, not entirely satisfied in his

mind, nevertheless softly followed the noiselessly gliding Jim to the lighthouse. Here Jim cautiously opened the door, motioning Pomfrey to enter.

The base of the tower was composed of two living rooms, a storeroom and oil-tank. As Pomfrey entered, Jim closed the door softly behind him. The abrupt transition from the glare of the sands and sun to the semi-darkness of the storeroom at first prevented him from seeing anything, but he was instantly distracted by a scurrying flutter and wild beating of the walls, as of a caged bird. In another moment he could make out the fair stranger, quivering with excitement, passionately dashing at the barred window, the walls, the locked door, and circling around the room in her desperate attempt to find an egress, like a captured seagull. Amazed, mystified, indignant with Jim, himself, and even his unfortunate captive, Pomfrey called to her in Chinook to stop, and going to the door, flung it wide open. She darted by him, raising her soft blue eyes for an instant in a swift, sidelong glance of half appeal, half-frightened admiration, and rushed out into the open. But here, to his surprise, she did not run away.

On the contrary, she drew herself up with a dignity that seemed to increase her height, and walked majestically towards Jim, who at her unexpected exit had suddenly thrown himself upon the sand, in utterly abject terror and supplication. She approached him slowly, with one small hand uplifted in a menacing gesture. The man writhed and squirmed before her. Then she turned, caught sight of Pomfrey standing in the doorway, and walked quietly away. Amazed, yet gratified with this new assertion of herself, Pomfrey respectfully, but alas! incautiously, called after her. In an instant, at the sound of his voice, she dropped again into her slouching Indian trot and glided away over the sandhills.

Pomfrey did not add any reproof of his own to the discomfiture of his Indian retainer. Neither did he attempt to inquire the secret of this savage girl's power over him. It was evident he had spoken truly when he told his master that she was of a superior caste. Pomfrey recalled her erect and indignant figure standing over the prostrate Jim, and was again perplexed and disappointed at her sudden lapse into the timid savage at the sound of his voice.

Would not this well-meant but miserable trick of Jim's have the effect of increasing her unreasoning animal-like distrust of him? A few days later brought an unexpected answer to his question.

It was the hottest hour of the day. He had been fishing off the reef of rocks where he had first seen her, and had taken in his line and was leisurely pulling for the lighthouse. Suddenly a little musical cry not unlike a bird's struck his ear. He lay on his oars and listened. It was repeated; but this time it was unmistakably recognizable as the voice of the Indian girl, although he had heard it but once. He turned eagerly to the rock, but it was empty; he pulled around it, but saw nothing. He looked towards the shore, and swung his boat in that direction, when again the cry was repeated with the faintest quaver of a laugh, apparently on the level of the sea before him. For the first time he looked down, and there on the crest of a wave not a dozen yards ahead, danced the yellow hair and laughing eyes of the girl. The frightened gravity of her look was gone, lost in the flash of her white teeth and quivering dimples as her dripping face

rose above the sea. When their eyes met she dived again, but quickly reappeared on the other bow, swimming with lazy, easy strokes, her smiling head thrown back over her white shoulder, as if luring him to a race. If her smile was a revelation to him, still more so was this first touch of feminine coquetry in her attitude. He pulled eagerly towards her; with a few long overhand strokes she kept her distance, or, if he approached too near, she dived like a loon, coming up astern of him with the same childlike, mocking cry. In vain he pursued her, calling her to stop in her own tongue, and laughingly protested; she easily avoided his boat at every turn. Suddenly, when they were nearly abreast of the river estuary, she rose in the water, and, waving her little hands with a gesture of farewell, turned, and curving her back like a dolphin, leaped into the surging swell of the estuary bar and was lost in its foam. It would have been madness for him to have attempted to follow in his boat, and he saw that she knew it. He waited until her yellow crest appeared in the smoother water of the river, and then rowed back. In his excitement and preoccupation he had quite

forgotten his long exposure to the sun during his active exercise, and that he was poorly equipped for the cold sea-fog which the heat had brought in earlier, and which now was quietly obliterating sea and shore. This made his progress slower and more difficult, and by the time he had reached the lighthouse he was chilled to the bone.

The next morning he woke with a dull headache and great weariness, and it was with considerable difficulty that he could attend to his duties. At nightfall, feeling worse, he determined to transfer the care of the light to Jim, but was amazed to find that he had disappeared, and what was more ominous, a bottle of spirits which Pomfrey had taken from his locker the night before had disappeared too. Like all Indians, Jim's rudimentary knowledge of civilization included "fire-water;" he evidently had been tempted, had fallen, and was too ashamed or too drunk to face his master. Pomfrey, however, managed to get the light in order and working, and then, he scarcely knew how, betook himself to bed in a state of high fever. He turned from side to side racked by pain, with burning lips and pulses. Strange fan-

cies beset him; he had noticed when he lit his light that a strange sail was looming off the estuary—a place where no sail had ever been seen or should be—and was relieved that the lighting of the tower might show the reckless or ignorant mariner his real bearings for the “Gate.” At times he had heard voices above the familiar song of the surf, and tried to rise from his bed, but could not. Sometimes these voices were strange, outlandish, dissonant, in his own language, yet only partly intelligible; but through them always rang a single voice, musical, familiar, yet of a tongue not his own—hers! And then, out of his delirium—for such it proved afterwards to be—came a strange vision. He thought that he had just lit the light when, from some strange and unaccountable reason, it suddenly became dim and defied all his efforts to revive it. To add to his discomfiture, he could see quite plainly through the lantern a strange-looking vessel standing in from the sea. She was so clearly out of her course for the Gate that he knew she had not seen the light, and his limbs trembled with shame and terror as he tried in vain to rekindle the dying light. Yet to

his surprise the strange ship kept steadily on, passing the dangerous reef of rocks, until she was actually in the waters of the bay. But stranger than all, swimming beneath her bows was the golden head and laughing face of the Indian girl, even as he had seen it the day before. A strange revulsion of feeling overtook him. Believing that she was luring the ship to its destruction, he ran out on the beach and strove to hail the vessel and warn it of its impending doom. But he could not speak — no sound came from his lips. And now his attention was absorbed by the ship itself. High-bowed and pooped, and curved like the crescent moon, it was the strangest craft that he had ever seen. Even as he gazed it glided on nearer and nearer, and at last beached itself noiselessly on the sands before his own feet. A score of figures as bizarre and outlandish as the ship itself now thronged its high forecastle — really a castle in shape and warlike purpose — and leaped from its ports. The common seamen were nearly naked to the waist; the officers looked more like soldiers than sailors. What struck him more strangely was that they were one and all seemingly un-

conscious of the existence of the lighthouse, sauntering up and down carelessly, as if on some uninhabited strand, and even talking — so far as he could understand their old bookish dialect — as if in some hitherto undiscovered land. Their ignorance of the geography of the whole coast, and even of the sea from which they came, actually aroused his critical indignation; their coarse and stupid allusions to the fair Indian swimmer as the “mermaid” that they had seen upon their bow made him more furious still. Yet he was helpless to express his contemptuous anger, or even make them conscious of his presence. Then an interval of incoherency and utter blankness followed. When he again took up the thread of his fancy the ship seemed to be lying on her beam ends on the sand; the strange arrangement of her upper deck and top-hammer, more like a dwelling than any ship he had ever seen, was fully exposed to view, while the seamen seemed to be at work with the rudest contrivances, calking and scraping her barnacled sides. He saw that phantom crew, when not working, at was-sail and festivity; heard the shouts of drunken roisterers; saw the placing of a

guard around some of the most uncontrollable, and later detected the stealthy escape of half a dozen sailors inland, amidst the fruitless volley fired upon them from obsolete blunderbusses. Then his strange vision transported him inland, where he saw these seamen following some Indian women. Suddenly one of them turned and ran frenziedly towards him as if seeking succor, closely pursued by one of the sailors. Pomfrey strove to reach her, struggled violently with the fearful apathy that seemed to hold his limbs, and then, as she uttered at last a little musical cry, burst his bonds and — awoke!

As consciousness slowly struggled back to him, he could see the bare wooden-like walls of his sleeping-room, the locker, the one window bright with sunlight, the open door of the tank-room, and the little staircase to the tower. There was a strange smoky and herb-like smell in the room. He made an effort to rise, but as he did so a small sunburnt hand was laid gently yet restrainingly upon his shoulder, and he heard the same musical cry as before, but this time modulated to a girlish laugh. He raised his head faintly. Half squatting,

half kneeling by his bed was the yellow-haired stranger.

With the recollection of his vision still perplexing him, he said in a weak voice, "Who are you?"

Her blue eyes met his own with quick intelligence and no trace of her former timidity. A soft, caressing light had taken its place. Pointing with her finger to her breast in a childlike gesture, she said, "Me — Olooya."

"Olooya!" He remembered suddenly that Jim had always used that word in speaking of her, but until then he had always thought it was some Indian term for her distinct class.

"Olooya," he repeated. Then, with difficulty attempting to use her own tongue, he asked, "When did you come here?"

"Last night," she answered in the same tongue. "There was no witch-fire there," she continued, pointing to the tower; "when it came not, Olooya came! Olooya found white chief sick and alone. White chief could not get up! Olooya lit witch-fire for him."

"You?" he repeated in astonishment. "I lit it myself."

She looked at him pityingly, as if still recognizing his delirium, and shook her head. "White chief was sick—how can know? Olooya made witch-fire."

He cast a hurried glance at his watch hanging on the wall beside him. It had *run down*, although he had wound it the last thing before going to bed. He had evidently been lying there helpless beyond the twenty-four hours!

He groaned and turned to rise, but she gently forced him down again, and gave him some herbal infusion, in which he recognized the taste of the Yerba Buena vine which grew by the river. Then she made him comprehend in her own tongue that Jim had been decoyed, while drunk, aboard a certain schooner lying off the shore at a spot where she had seen some men digging in the sands. She had not gone there, for she was afraid of the bad men, and a slight return of her former terror came into her changeful eyes. She knew how to light the witch-light; she reminded him she had been in the tower before.

"You have saved my light, and perhaps my life," he said weakly, taking her hand.

Possibly she did not understand him, for

her only answer was a vague smile. But the next instant she started up, listening intently, and then with a frightened cry drew away her hand and suddenly dashed out of the building. In the midst of his amazement the door was darkened by a figure—a stranger dressed like an ordinary miner. Pausing a moment to look after the flying Olooya, the man turned and glanced around the room, and then with a coarse, familiar smile approached Pomfrey.

“Hope I ain’t disturbin’ ye, but I allowed I’d just be neighborly and drop in—seein’ as this is gov’nment property, and me and my pardners, as American citizens and tax-payers, helps to support it. We’re coastin’ from Trinidad down here and prospectin’ along the beach for gold in the sand. Ye seem to hev a mighty soft berth of it here—nothing to do—and lots of purty half-breeds hangin’ round!”

The man’s effrontery was too much for Pomfrey’s self-control, weakened by illness. “It is government property,” he answered hotly, “and you have no more right to intrude upon it than you have to decoy away my servant, a government employee, during my illness, and jeopardize that property.”

The unexpectedness of this attack, and the sudden revelation of the fact of Pomfrey's illness in his flushed face and hollow voice apparently frightened and confused the stranger. He stammered a surly excuse, backed out of the doorway, and disappeared. An hour later Jim appeared, crestfallen, remorseful, and extravagantly penitent. Pomfrey was too weak for reproaches or inquiry, and he was thinking only of Olooya.

She did not return. His recovery in that keen air, aided, as he sometimes thought, by the herbs she had given him, was almost as rapid as his illness. The miners did not again intrude upon the lighthouse nor trouble his seclusion. When he was able to sun himself on the sands, he could see them in the distance at work on the beach. He reflected that she would not come back while they were there, and was reconciled. But one morning Jim appeared, awkward and embarrassed, leading another Indian, whom he introduced as Olooya's brother. Pomfrey's suspicions were aroused. Except that the stranger had something of the girl's superiority of manner, there was no likeness whatever to his fair-haired acquaintance.

But a fury of indignation was added to his suspicions when he learned the amazing purport of their visit. It was nothing less than an offer from the alleged brother to *sell* his sister to Pomfrey for forty dollars and a jug of whiskey! Unfortunately, Pomfrey's temper once more got the better of his judgment. With a scathing exposition of the laws under which the Indian and white man equally lived, and the legal punishment of kidnaping, he swept what he believed was the impostor from his presence. He was scarcely alone again before he remembered that his imprudence might affect the girl's future access to him, but it was too late now.

Still he clung to the belief that he should see her when the prospectors had departed, and he hailed with delight the breaking up of the camp near the "sweat-house" and the disappearance of the schooner. It seemed that their gold-seeking was unsuccessful; but Pomfrey was struck, on visiting the locality, to find that in their excavations in the sand at the estuary they had uncovered the decaying timbers of a ship's small boat of some ancient and obsolete construction. This made him think of his

strange dream, with a vague sense of warning which he could not shake off, and on his return to the lighthouse he took from his shelves a copy of the old voyages to see how far his fancy had been affected by his reading. In the account of Drake's visit to the coast he found a footnote which he had overlooked before, and which ran as follows: "The Admiral seems to have lost several of his crew by desertion, who were supposed to have perished miserably by starvation in the inhospitable interior or by the hands of savages. But later voyagers have suggested that the deserters married Indian wives, and there is a legend that a hundred years later a singular race of half-breeds, bearing unmistakable Anglo-Saxon characteristics, was found in that locality." Pomfrey fell into a reverie of strange hypotheses and fancies. He resolved that, when he again saw Olooya, he would question her; her terror of these men might be simply racial or some hereditary transmission.

But his intention was never fulfilled. For when days and weeks had elapsed, and he had vainly haunted the river estuary and the rocky reef before the lighthouse without

a sign of her, he overcame his pride sufficiently to question Jim. The man looked at him with dull astonishment.

"Olooya gone," he said.

"Gone! — where?"

The Indian made a gesture to seaward which seemed to encompass the whole Pacific.

"How? With whom?" repeated his angry yet half-frightened master.

"With white man in ship. You say *you* no want Olooya — forty dollars too much. White man give fifty dollars — takee Olooya all same."

UNDER THE EAVES

THE assistant editor of the San Francisco "Daily Informer" was going home. So much of his time was spent in the office of the "Informer" that no one ever cared to know where he passed those six hours of sleep which presumably suggested a domicile. His business appointments outside the office were generally kept at the restaurant where he breakfasted and dined, or of evenings in the lobbies of theatres or the anterooms of public meetings. Yet he had a home and an interval of seclusion of which he was jealously mindful, and it was to this he was going to-night at his usual hour.

His room was in a new building on one of the larger and busier thoroughfares. The lower floor was occupied by a bank, but as it was closed before he came home, and not yet opened when he left, it did not disturb his domestic sensibilities. The same may be said of the next floor, which was devoted to stockbrokers' and companies' offices, and was equally tomb-like and silent

when he passed; the floor above that was a desert of empty rooms, which echoed to his footsteps night and morning, with here and there an oasis in the green sign of a mining secretary's office, with, however, the desolating announcement that it would only be "open for transfers from two to four on Saturdays." The top floor had been frankly abandoned in an unfinished state by the builder, whose ambition had "o'erleaped itself" in that sanguine era of the city's growth. There was a smell of plaster and the first coat of paint about it still, but the whole front of the building was occupied by a long room with odd "bull's-eye" windows looking out through the heavy ornamentations of the cornice over the adjacent roofs.

It had been originally intended for a club-room, but after the ill fortune which attended the letting of the floor below, and possibly because the earthquake-fearing San Franciscans had their doubts of successful hilarity at the top of so tall a building, it remained unfinished, with the two smaller rooms at its side. Its incomplete and lonely grandeur had once struck the editor during a visit of inspection, and the land-

lord, whom he knew, had offered to make it habitable for him at a nominal rent. It had a lavatory with a marble basin and a tap of cold water. The offer was a novel one, but he accepted it, and fitted up the apartment with some cheap second-hand furniture, quite inconsistent with the carved mantels and decorations, and made a fair sitting-room and bedroom of it. Here, on a Sunday, when its stillness was intensified, and even a passing footstep on the pavement fifty feet below was quite startling, he would sit and work by one of the quaint open windows. In the rainy season, through the filmed panes he sometimes caught a glimpse of the distant, white-capped bay, but never of the street below him.

The lights were out, but, groping his way up to the first landing, he took from a cupboarded niche in the wall his candlestick and matches and continued the ascent to his room. The humble candlelight flickered on the ostentatious gold letters displayed on the ground-glass doors of opulent companies which he knew were famous, and rooms where millionaires met in secret conclave, but the contrast awakened only his sense of humor. Yet he was always relieved after

he had reached his own floor. Possibly its incompleteness and inchoate condition made it seem less lonely than the desolation of the finished and furnished rooms below, and it was only this recollection of past human occupancy that was depressing.

He opened his door, lit the solitary gas jet that only half illuminated the long room, and, it being already past midnight, began to undress himself. This process presently brought him to that corner of his room where his bed stood, when he suddenly stopped, and his sleepy yawn changed to a gape of surprise. For, lying in the bed, its head upon the pillow, and its rigid arms accurately stretched down over the turned-back sheet, was a child's doll! It was a small doll—a banged and battered doll, that had seen service, but it had evidently been “tucked in” with maternal tenderness, and lay there with its staring eyes turned to the ceiling, the very genius of insomnia!

His first start of surprise was followed by a natural resentment of what might have been an impertinent intrusion on his privacy by some practical-joking adult, for he knew there was no child in the house.

His room was kept in order by the wife

of the night watchman employed by the bank, and no one else had a right of access to it. But the woman might have brought a child there and not noticed its disposal of its plaything. He smiled. It might have been worse! It might have been a real baby!

The idea tickled him with a promise of future "copy" — of a story with farcical complications, or even a dramatic ending, in which the baby, adopted by him, should turn out to be somebody's stolen offspring. He lifted the little image that had suggested these fancies, carefully laid it on his table, went to bed, and presently forgot it all in slumber.

In the morning his good-humor and interest in it revived to the extent of writing on a slip of paper, "Good-morning! Thank you — I've slept very well," putting the slip in the doll's jointed arms, and leaving it in a sitting posture outside his door when he left his room. When he returned late at night it was gone.

But it so chanced that, a few days later, owing to press of work on the "Informer," he was obliged to forego his usual Sunday holiday out of town, and that morning

found him, while the bells were ringing for church, in his room with a pile of manuscript and proof before him. For these were troublous days in San Francisco; the great Vigilance Committee of '56 was in session, and the offices of the daily papers were thronged with eager seekers of news. Such affairs, indeed, were not in the functions of the assistant editor, nor exactly to his taste; he was neither a partisan of the so-called Law and Order Party, nor yet an enthusiastic admirer of the citizen Revolutionists known as the Vigilance Committee, both extremes being incompatible with his habits of thought. Consequently he was not displeased at this opportunity of doing his work away from the office and the "heady talk" of controversy.

He worked on until the bells ceased and a more than Sabbath stillness fell upon the streets. So quiet was it that once or twice the conversation of passing pedestrians floated up and into his window, as of voices at his elbow.

Presently he heard the sound of a child's voice singing in subdued tone, as if fearful of being overheard. This time he laid aside his pen — it certainly was no delusion!

The sound did not come from the open window, but from some space on a level with his room. Yet there was no contiguous building as high.

He rose and tried to open his door softly, but it creaked, and the singing instantly ceased. There was nothing before him but the bare, empty hall, with its lathed and plastered partitions, and the two smaller rooms, unfinished like his own, on either side of him. Their doors were shut; the one at his right hand was locked, the other yielded to his touch.

For the first moment he saw only the bare walls of the apparently empty room. But a second glance showed him two children — a boy of seven and a girl of five — sitting on the floor, which was further littered by a mattress, pillow, and blanket. There was a cheap tray on one of the trunks containing two soiled plates and cups and fragments of a meal. But there was neither a chair nor table nor any other article of furniture in the room. Yet he was struck by the fact that, in spite of this poverty of surrounding, the children were decently dressed, and the few scattered pieces of luggage in quality bespoke a superior condition.

The children met his astonished stare with an equal wonder and, he fancied, some little fright. The boy's lips trembled a little as he said apologetically —

“I told Jinny not to sing. But she did n't make *much* noise.”

“Mamma said I could play with my dolly. But I fordot and singed,” said the little girl penitently.

“Where's your mamma?” asked the young man. The fancy of their being near relatives of the night watchman had vanished at the sound of their voices.

“Dorn out,” said the girl.

“When did she go out?”

“Last night.”

“Were you all alone here last night?”

“Yes!”

Perhaps they saw the look of indignation and pity in the editor's face, for the boy said quickly —

“She don't go out *every* night; last night she went to” —

He stopped suddenly, and both children looked at each other with a half laugh and half cry, and then repeated in hopeless unison, “She's dorn out.”

“When is she coming back again?”

"To-night. But we won't make any more noise."

"Who brings you your food?" continued the editor, looking at the tray.

"Woberts."

Evidently Roberts, the night watchman! The editor felt relieved; here was a clue to some explanation. He instantly sat down on the floor between them.

"So that was the dolly that slept in my bed," he said gayly, taking it up.

God gives helplessness a wonderful intuition of its friends. The children looked up at the face of their grown-up companion, giggled, and then burst into a shrill fit of laughter. He felt that it was the first one they had really indulged in for many days. Nevertheless he said, "Hush!" confidentially; why he scarcely knew, except to intimate to them that he had taken in their situation thoroughly. "Make no noise," he added softly, "and come into my big room."

They hung back, however, with frightened yet longing eyes. "Mamma said we mussent do out of this room," said the girl.

"Not *alone*," responded the editor quickly, "but with *me*, you know; that's different."

The logic sufficed them, poor as it was. Their hands slid quite naturally into his. But at the door he stopped, and motioning to the locked door of the other room, asked:—

“And is that mamma’s room, too?”

Their little hands slipped from his and they were silent. Presently the boy, as if acted upon by some occult influence of the girl, said in a half whisper, “Yes.”

The editor did not question further, but led them into his room. Here they lost the slight restraint they had shown, and began, child fashion, to become questioners themselves.

In a few moments they were in possession of his name, his business, the kind of restaurant he frequented, where he went when he left his room all day, the meaning of those funny slips of paper, and the written manuscripts, and why he was so quiet. But any attempt of his to retaliate by counter questions was met by a sudden reserve so unchildlike and painful to him—as it was evidently to themselves—that he desisted, wisely postponing his inquiries until he could meet Roberts.

He was glad when they fell to playing

games with each other quite naturally, yet not entirely forgetting his propinquity, as their occasional furtive glances at his movements showed him. He, too, became presently absorbed in his work, until it was finished and it was time for him to take it to the office of the "Informer." The wild idea seized him of also taking the children afterwards for a holiday to the Mission Dolores, but he prudently remembered that even this negligent mother of theirs might have some rights over her offspring that he was bound to respect.

He took leave of them gayly, suggesting that the doll be replaced in his bed while he was away, and even assisted in "tucking it up." But during the afternoon the recollection of these lonely playfellows in the deserted house obtruded itself upon his work and the talk of his companions. Sunday night was his busiest night, and he could not, therefore, hope to get away in time to assure himself of their mother's return.

It was nearly two in the morning when he returned to his room. He paused for a moment on the threshold to listen for any sound from the adjoining room. But all was hushed.

His intention of speaking to the night watchman was, however, anticipated the next morning by that guardian himself. A tap upon his door while he was dressing caused him to open it somewhat hurriedly in the hope of finding one of the children there, but he met only the embarrassed face of Roberts. Inviting him into the room, the editor continued dressing. Carefully closing the door behind him, the man began, with evident hesitation, —

“I oughter hev told ye suthin’ afore, Mr. Breeze; but I kalkilated, so to speak, that you would n’t be bothered one way or another, and so ye had n’t any call to know that there was folks here” —

“Oh, I see,” interrupted Breeze cheerfully; “you ’re speaking of the family next door — the landlord’s new tenants.”

“They ain’t exactly *that*,” said Roberts, still with embarrassment. “The fact is — ye see — the thing points *this* way: they ain’t no right to be here, and it’s as much as my place is worth if it leaks out that they are.”

Mr. Breeze suspended his collar-buttoning, and stared at Roberts.

“You see, sir, they ’re mighty poor, and

they 've nowhere else to go — and I reckoned to take 'em in here for a spell and say nothing about it."

"But the landlord would n't object, surely? I'll speak to him myself," said Breeze impulsively.

"Oh, no; don't!" said Roberts in alarm; "he would n't like it. You see, Mr. Breeze, it's just this way: the mother, she's a born lady, and did my old woman a good turn in old times when the family was rich; but now she's obliged — just to support herself, you know — to take up with what she gets, and she acts in the bally in the theatre, you see, and hez to come in late o' nights. In them cheap boarding-houses, you know, the folks looks down upon her for that, and won't hev her, and in the cheap hotels the men are — you know — a darned sight wuss, and that's how I took her and her kids in here, where no one knows 'em."

"I see," nodded the editor sympathetically; "and very good it was of you, my man."

Roberts looked still more confused, and stammered with a forced laugh, "And — so — I'm just keeping her on here, unbe-

knownst, until her husband gets"— He stopped suddenly.

"So she has a husband living, then?" said Breeze in surprise.

"In the mines, yes—in the mines!" repeated Roberts with a monotonous deliberation quite distinct from his previous hesitation, "and she's only waitin' until he gets money enough—to—to take her away." He stopped and breathed hard.

"But could n't you—could n't *we*—get her some more furniture? There's nothing in that room, you know, not a chair or table; and unless the other room is better furnished"—

"Eh? Oh, yes!" said Roberts quickly, yet still with a certain embarrassment; "of course *that's* better furnished, and she's quite satisfied, and so are the kids, with anything. And now, Mr. Breeze, I reckon you'll say nothin' o' this, and you'll never go back on me?"

"My dear Mr. Roberts," said the editor gravely, "from this moment I am not only blind, but deaf to the fact that *anybody* occupies this floor but myself."

"I knew you was white all through, Mr. Breeze," said the night watchman, grasping

the young man's hand with a grip of iron, "and I telled my wife so. I sez, 'Jest you let me tell him *everythin'*,' but she" — He stopped again and became confused.

"And she was quite right, I dare say," said Breeze, with a laugh; "and I do not want to know anything. And that poor woman must never know that I ever knew anything, either. But you may tell your wife that when the mother is away she can bring the little ones in here whenever she likes."

"Thank ye — thank ye, sir! — and I'll just run down and tell the old woman now, and won't intrude upon your dressin' any longer."

He grasped Breeze's hand again, went out and closed the door behind him. It might have been the editor's fancy, but he thought there was a certain interval of silence outside the door before the night watchman's heavy tread was heard along the hall again.

For several evenings after this Mr. Breeze paid some attention to the ballet in his usual round of the theatres. Although he had never seen his fair neighbor, he had a vague idea that he might recognize her

through some likeness to her children. But in vain. In the opulent charms of certain nymphs, and in the angular austerities of others, he failed equally to discern any of those refinements which might have distinguished the "born lady" of Roberts's story, or which he himself had seen in her children.

These he did not meet again during the week, as his duties kept him late at the office; but from certain signs in his room he knew that Mrs. Roberts had availed herself of his invitation to bring them in with her, and he regularly found "Jinny's" doll tucked up in his bed at night, and he as regularly disposed of it outside his door in the morning, with a few sweets, like an offering, tucked under its rigid arms.

But another circumstance touched him more delicately; his room was arranged with greater care than before, and with an occasional exhibition of taste that certainly had not distinguished Mrs. Roberts's previous ministrations. One evening on his return he found a small bouquet of inexpensive flowers in a glass on his writing-table. He loved flowers too well not to detect that they were quite fresh, and could

have been put there only an hour or two before he arrived.

The next evening was Saturday, and, as he usually left the office earlier on that day, it occurred to him, as he walked home, that it was about the time his fair neighbor would be leaving the theatre, and that it was possible he might meet her.

At the front door, however, he found Roberts, who returned his greeting with a certain awkwardness which struck him as singular. When he reached the niche on the landing he found his candle was gone, but he proceeded on, groping his way up the stairs, with an odd conviction that both these incidents pointed to the fact that the woman had just returned or was expected.

He had also a strange feeling — which may have been owing to the darkness — that some one was hidden on the landing or on the stairs where he would pass. This was further accented by a faint odor of patchouli, as, with his hand on the rail, he turned the corner of the third landing, and he was convinced that if he had put out his other hand it would have come in contact with his mysterious neighbor. But a certain instinct of respect for her secret, which

she was even now guarding in the darkness, withheld him, and he passed on quickly to his own floor.

Here it was lighter; the moon shot a beam of silver across the passage from an unshuttered window as he passed. He reached his room door, entered, but instead of lighting the gas and shutting the door, stood with it half open, listening in the darkness.

His suspicions were verified; there was a slight rustling noise, and a figure which had evidently followed him appeared at the end of the passage. It was that of a woman habited in a grayish dress and cloak of the same color; but as she passed across the band of moonlight he had a distinct view of her anxious, worried face. It was a face no longer young; it was worn with illness, but still replete with a delicacy and faded beauty so inconsistent with her avowed profession that he felt a sudden pang of pain and doubt. The next moment she had vanished in her room, leaving the same faint perfume behind her. He closed his door softly, lit the gas, and sat down in a state of perplexity. That swift glimpse of her face and figure had made her story

improbable to the point of absurdity, or possibly to the extreme of pathos!

It seemed incredible that a woman of that quality should be forced to accept a vocation at once so low, so distasteful, and so unremunerative. With her evident antecedents, had she no friends but this common Western night watchman of a bank? Had Roberts deceived him? Was his whole story a fabrication, and was there some complicity between the two? What was it? He knit his brows.

Mr. Breeze had that overpowering knowledge of the world which only comes with the experience of twenty-five, and to this he superadded the active imagination of a newspaper man. A plot to rob the bank? These mysterious absences, that luggage which he doubted not was empty and intended for spoil! But why encumber herself with the two children? Here his common sense and instinct of the ludicrous returned and he smiled.

But he could not believe in the ballet dancer! He wondered, indeed, how any manager could have accepted the grim satire of that pale, worried face among the fairies, that sad refinement amid their vacant smiles

and rouged cheeks. And then, growing sad again, he comforted himself with the reflection that at least the children were not alone that night, and so went to sleep.

For some days he had no further meeting with his neighbors. The disturbed state of the city — for the Vigilance Committee were still in session — obliged the daily press to issue “extras,” and his work at the office increased.

It was not until Sunday again that he was able to be at home. Needless to say that his solitary little companions were duly installed there, while he sat at work with his proofs on the table before him.

The stillness of the empty house was only broken by the habitually subdued voices of the children at their play, when suddenly the harsh stroke of a distant bell came through the open window. But it was no Sabbath bell, and Mr. Breeze knew it. It was the tocsin of the Vigilance Committee, summoning the members to assemble at their quarters for a capture, a trial, or an execution of some wrongdoer. To him it was equally a summons to the office — to distasteful news and excitement.

He threw his proofs aside in disgust, laid

down his pen, seized his hat, and paused a moment to look round for his playmates. But they were gone! He went into the hall, looked into the open door of their room, but they were not there. He tried the door of the second room, but it was locked.

Satisfied that they had stolen downstairs in their eagerness to know what the bell meant, he hurried down also, met Roberts in the passage, — a singularly unusual circumstance at that hour, — called to him to look after the runaways, and hurried to his office.

Here he found the staff collected, excitedly discussing the news. One of the Vigilance Committee prisoners, a notorious bully and ruffian, detained as a criminal and a witness, had committed suicide in his cell. Fortunately this was all reportorial work, and the services of Mr. Breeze were not required. He hurried back, relieved, to his room.

When he reached his landing, breathlessly, he heard the same quick rustle he had heard that memorable evening, and was quite satisfied that he saw a figure glide swiftly out of the open door of his room.

It was no doubt his neighbor, who had been seeking her children, and as he heard their voices as he passed, his uneasiness and suspicions were removed.

He sat down again to his scattered papers and proofs, finished his work, and took it to the office on his way to dinner. He returned early, in the hope that he might meet his neighbor again, and had quite settled his mind that he was justified in offering a civil "Good-evening" to her, in spite of his previous respectful ignoring of her presence. She must certainly have become aware by this time of his attention to her children and consideration for herself, and could not mistake his motives. But he was disappointed, although he came up softly; he found the floor in darkness and silence on his return, and he had to be content with lighting his gas and settling down to work again.

A near church clock had struck ten when he was startled by the sound of an unfamiliar and uncertain step in the hall, followed by a tap at his door. Breeze jumped to his feet, and was astonished to find Dick, the "printer's devil," standing on the threshold with a roll of proofs in his hand.

"How did you get here?" he asked testily.

"They told me at the restaurant they reckoned you lived yere, and the night watchman at the door headed me straight up. When he knew whar I kem from he wanted to know what the news was, but I told him he'd better buy an extra and see."

"Well, what did you come for?" said the editor impatiently.

"The foreman said it was important, and he wanted to know afore he went to press ef this yer correction was *yours*?"

He went to the table, unrolled the proofs, and, taking out the slip, pointed to a marked paragraph. "The foreman says the reporter who brought the news allows he got it straight first-hand! But ef you've corrected it, he reckons you know best."

Breeze saw at a glance that the paragraph alluded to was not of his own writing, but one of several news items furnished by reporters. These had been "set up" in the same "galley," and consequently appeared in the same proof-slip. He was about to say curtly that neither the matter nor the correction was his, when something

odd in the correction of the item struck him. It read as follows:—

“It appears that the notorious ‘Jim Bodine,’ who is in hiding and badly wanted by the Vigilance Committee, has been tempted lately into a renewal of his old recklessness. He was seen in Sacramento Street the other night by two separate witnesses, one of whom followed him, but he escaped in some friendly doorway.”

The words “in Sacramento Street” were stricken out and replaced by the correction “on the Saucelito shore,” and the words “friendly doorway” were changed to “friendly dinghy.” The correction was not his, nor the handwriting, which was further disguised by being an imitation of print. A strange idea seized him.

“Has any one seen these proofs since I left them at the office?”

“No, only the foreman, sir.”

He remembered that he had left the proofs lying openly on his table when he was called to the office at the stroke of the alarm bell; he remembered the figure he saw gliding from his room on his return. She had been there alone with the proofs; she only could have tampered with them.

The evident object of the correction was to direct the public attention from Sacramento Street to Saucelito, as the probable whereabouts of this "Jimmy Bodine." The street below was Sacramento Street, the "friendly doorway" might have been their own.

That she had some knowledge of this Bodine was not more improbable than the ballet story. Her strange absences, the mystery surrounding her, all seemed to testify that she had some connection — perhaps only an innocent one — with these desperate people whom the Vigilance Committee were hunting down. Her attempt to save the man was, after all, no more illegal than their attempt to capture him. True, she might have trusted him, Breeze, without this tampering with his papers; yet perhaps she thought he was certain to discover it — and it was only a silent appeal to his mercy. The corrections were ingenious and natural — it was the act of an intelligent, quick-witted woman.

Mr. Breeze was prompt in acting upon his intuition, whether right or wrong. He took up his pen, wrote on the margin of the proof, "Print as corrected," said to the

boy carelessly, "The corrections are all right," and dismissed him quickly.

The corrected paragraph which appeared in the "Informer" the next morning seemed to attract little public attention, the greater excitement being the suicide of the imprisoned bully and the effect it might have upon the prosecution of other suspected parties, against whom the dead man had been expected to bear witness.

Mr. Breeze was unable to obtain any information regarding the desperado Bodine's associates and relations; his correction of the paragraph had made the other members of the staff believe he had secret and superior information regarding the fugitive, and he thus was estopped from asking questions. But he felt himself justified now in demanding fuller information from Roberts at the earliest opportunity.

For this purpose he came home earlier that night, hoping to find the night watchman still on his first beat in the lower halls. But he was disappointed. He was amazed, however, on reaching his own landing, to find the passage piled with new luggage, some of that ruder type of rolled blanket and knapsack known as a "miner's kit."

He was still more surprised to hear men's voices and the sound of laughter proceeding from the room that was always locked. A sudden sense of uneasiness and disgust, he knew not why, came over him.

He passed quickly into his room, shut the door sharply, and lit the gas. But he presently heard the door of the locked room open, a man's voice, slightly elevated by liquor and opposition, saying, "I know what's due from one gen'leman to 'nother" — a querulous, objecting voice saying, "Hole on! not now," and a fainter feminine protest, all of which were followed by a rap on his door.

Breeze opened it to two strangers, one of whom lurched forward unsteadily with outstretched hand. He had a handsome face and figure, and a certain consciousness of it even in the *abandon* of liquor; he had an aggressive treacherousness of eye which his potations had not subdued. He grasped Breeze's hand tightly, but dropped it the next moment perfunctorily as he glanced round the room.

"I told them I was bound to come in," he said, without looking at Breeze, "and say 'Howdy!' to the man that's bin a pal

to my women folks and the kids — and acted white all through! I said to Mame, ‘I reckon *he* knows who *I* am, and that I kin be high-toned to them that’s high-toned; kin return shake for shake and shot for shot!’ Aye! that’s me! So I was bound to come in like a gen’leman, sir, and here I am!”

He threw himself in an unproffered chair and stared at Breeze.

“I’m afraid,” said Breeze dryly, “that, nevertheless, I never knew who you were, and that even now I am ignorant whom I am addressing.”

“That’s just it,” said the second man, with a querulous protest, which did not, however, conceal his admiring vassalage to his friend; “that’s what I’m allus telling Jim. ‘Jim,’ I says, ‘how is folks to know you’re the man that shot Kernel Baxter, and dropped three o’ them Mariposa Vigilants? They did n’t see you do it! They just look at your fancy style and them mustaches of yours, and allow ye might be death on the girls, but they don’t know ye! An’ this man yere — he’s a scribe in them papers — writes what the boss editor tells him, and lives up yere on the roof, ’long-

side yer wife and the children — what's he knowin' about *you*?' Jim's all right enough," he continued, in easy confidence to Breeze, "but he's too fresh 'bout himself."

Mr. James Bodine accepted this tribute and criticism of his henchman with a complacent laugh, which was not, however, without a certain contempt for the speaker and the man spoken to. His bold, selfish eyes wandered round the room as if in search of some other amusement than his companions offered.

"I reckon this is the room which that hound of a landlord, Rakes, allowed he'd fix up for our poker club — the club that Dan Simmons and me got up, with a few other sports. It was to be a slap-up affair, right under the roof, where there was no chance of the police raiding us. But the cur weakened when the Vigilants started out to make war on any game a gen'leman might hev that was n't in their gummy-bag, salt pork trade. Well, it's gettin' a long time between drinks, gen'lemen, ain't it?" He looked round him significantly.

Only the thought of the woman and her children in the next room, and the shame

that he believed she was enduring, enabled Breeze to keep his temper or even a show of civility.

"I'm afraid," he said quietly, "that you'll find very little here to remind you of the club — not even the whiskey; for I use the room only as a bedroom, and as I am a workingman, and come in late and go out early, I have never found it available for hospitality, even to my intimate friends. I am very glad, however, that the little leisure I have had in it has enabled me to make the floor less lonely for your children."

Mr. Bodine got up with an affected yawn, turned an embarrassed yet darkening eye on Breeze, and lunged unsteadily to the door. "And as I only happened in to do the reg'lar thing between high-toned gen'lemen, I reckon we kin say 'Quits.'" He gave a coarse laugh, said "So long," nodded, stumbled into the passage, and thence into the other room.

His companion watched him pass out with a relieved yet protecting air, and then, closing the door softly, drew nearer to Breeze, and said in husky confidence, —

"Ye ain't seein' him at his best, mister!

He's bin drinkin' too much, and this yer news has upset him."

"What news?" asked Breeze.

"This yer suicide o' Irish Jack!"

"Was he his friend?"

"Friend?" ejaculated the man, horrified at the mere suggestion. "Not much! Why, Irish Jack was the only man that could hev hung Jim! Now he's dead, in course the Vigilants ain't got no proof agin Jim. Jim wants to face it out now an' stay here, but his wife and me don't see it noways! So we are taking advantage o' the lull agin him to get him off down the coast this very night. That's why he's been off his head drinkin'. Ye see, when a man has been for weeks hidin' — part o' the time in that room and part o' the time on the wharf, where them Vigilants has been watchin' every ship that left in order to ketch him, he's inclined to celebrate his chance o' getting away" —

"Part of the time in that room?" interrupted Breeze quickly.

"Sartin! Don't ye see? He allus kem in as you went out — *sabe!* — and got away before you kem back, his wife all the time just a-hoverin' between the two places, and

keeping watch for him. It was killin' to her, you see, for she was n't brought up to it, whiles Jim did n't keer — had two revolvers and kalkilated to kill a dozen Vigilants afore he dropped. But that's over now, and when I've got him safe on that 'plunger' down at the wharf to-night, and put him aboard the schooner that's lying off the Heads, he's all right agin."

"And Roberts knew all this and was one of his friends?" asked Breeze.

"Roberts knew it, and Roberts's wife used to be a kind of servant to Jim's wife in the South, when she was a girl, but I don't know ez Roberts is his *friend*!"

"He certainly has shown himself one," said Breeze.

"Ye-e-s," said the stranger meditatively, "ye-e-s." He stopped, opened the door softly, and peeped out, and then closed it again softly. "It's sing'lar, Mr. Breeze," he went on in a sudden yet embarrassed burst of confidence, "that Jim thar — a man thet can shoot straight, and hez frequent; a man thet knows every skin game goin' — that *thet* man Jim," very slowly, "hez n't really — got — any friends — 'cept me — and his wife."

“Indeed?” said Mr. Breeze dryly.

“Sure! Why, you yourself did n’t cotton to him — I could see *thet*.”

Mr. Breeze felt himself redden slightly, and looked curiously at the man. This vulgar parasite, whom he had set down as a worshiper of sham heroes, undoubtedly did not look like an associate of Bodine’s, and had a certain seriousness that demanded respect. As he looked closer into his wide, round face, seamed with small-pox, he fancied he saw even in its fatuous imbecility something of that haunting devotion he had seen on the refined features of the wife. He said more gently, —

“But one friend like you would seem to be enough.”

“I ain’t what I uster be, Mr. Breeze,” said the man meditatively, “and mebbe ye don’t know who I am. I’m Abe Shuckster, of Shuckster’s Ranch — one of the biggest in Petalumy. I was a rich man until a year ago, when Jim got inter trouble. What with mortgages and interest, payin’ up Jim’s friends and buying off some ez was set agin him, thar ain’t much left, and when I’ve settled that bill for the schooner lying off the Heads there I reckon

I'm about played out. But I've allus a shanty at Petalummy, and mebbe when things is froze over and Jim gets back — you'll come and see him — for you ain't seen him at his best."

"I suppose his wife and children go with him?" said Breeze.

"No! He's agin it, and wants them to come later. But that's all right, for you see she kin go back to their own house at the Mission, now that the Vigilants are givin' up shadderin' it. So long, Mr. Breeze! We're startin' afore daylight. Sorry you did n't see Jim in condition."

He grasped Breeze's hand warmly and slipped out of the door softly. For an instant Mr. Breeze felt inclined to follow him into the room and make a kinder adieu to the pair, but the reflection that he might embarrass the wife, who, it would seem, had purposely avoided accompanying her husband when he entered, withheld him. And for the last few minutes he had been doubtful if he had any right to pose as her friend. Beside the devotion of the man who had just left him, his own scant kindness to her children seemed ridiculous.

He went to bed, but tossed uneasily until

he fancied he heard stealthy footsteps outside his door and in the passage. Even then he thought of getting up, dressing, and going out to bid farewell to the fugitives. But even while he was thinking of it he fell asleep and did not wake until the sun was shining in at his windows.

He sprang to his feet, threw on his dressing-gown, and peered into the passage. Everything was silent. He stepped outside—the light streamed into the hall from the open doors and windows of both rooms—the floor was empty; not a trace of the former occupants remained. He was turning back when his eye fell upon the battered wooden doll set upright against his door-jamb, holding stiffly in its jointed arms a bit of paper folded like a note. Opening it, he found a few lines written in pencil.

God bless you for your kindness to us, and try to forgive me for touching your papers. But I thought that you would detect it, know *why* I did it, and then help us, as you did! Good-by!

MAMIE BODINE.

Mr. Breeze laid down the paper with a

slight accession of color, as if its purport had been ironical. How little had he done compared to the devotion of this delicate woman or the sacrifices of that rough friend! How deserted looked this nest under the eaves, which had so long borne its burden of guilt, innocence, shame, and suffering! For many days afterwards he avoided it except at night, and even then he often found himself lying awake to listen to the lost voices of the children.

But one evening, a fortnight later, he came upon Roberts in the hall. "Well," said Breeze, with abrupt directness, "did he get away?"

Roberts started, uttered an oath which it is possible the Recording Angel passed to his credit, and said, "Yes, *he* got away all right!"

"Why, has n't his wife joined him?"

"No. Never, in this world, I reckon; and if anywhere in the next, I don't want to go there!" said Roberts furiously.

"Is he dead?"

"Dead? That kind don't die!"

"What do you mean?"

Roberts's lips writhed, and then, with a strong effort, he said with deliberate dis-

tinctness, "I mean — that the hound went off with another woman — that — was — in — that schooner, and left that fool Shuckster adrift in the plunger."

"And the wife and children?"

"Shuckster sold his shanty at Petaluma to pay their passage to the States. Good-night!"

HOW REUBEN ALLEN "SAW LIFE" IN SAN FRANCISCO

THE junior partner of the firm of Sparlow & Kane, "Druggists and Apothecaries," of San Francisco, was gazing meditatively out of the corner of the window of their little shop in Dupont Street. He could see the dimly lit perspective of the narrow thoroughfare fade off into the level sand wastes of Market Street on the one side, and plunge into the half-excavated bulk of Telegraph Hill on the other. He could see the glow and hear the rumble of Montgomery Street—the great central avenue farther down the hill. Above the housetops was spread the warm blanket of sea-fog under which the city was regularly laid to sleep every summer night to the cool lullaby of the Northwest Trades. It was already half-past eleven; footsteps on the wooden pavement were getting rarer and more remote; the last cart had rumbled by; the shutters were up along the street; the glare of his own red and blue jars was the

only beacon left to guide the wayfarers. Ordinarily he would have been going home at this hour, when his partner, who occupied the surgery and a small bedroom at the rear of the shop, always returned to relieve him. That night, however, a professional visit would detain the "Doctor" until half-past twelve. There was still an hour to wait. He felt drowsy; the mysterious incense of the shop, that combined essence of drugs, spice, scented soap, and orris root — which always reminded him of the Arabian Nights — was affecting him. He yawned, and then, turning away, passed behind the counter, took down a jar labeled "Glycyrr. Glabra," selected a piece of Spanish licorice, and meditatively sucked it. Not receiving from it that diversion and sustenance he apparently was seeking, he also visited, in an equally familiar manner, a jar marked "Jujubes," and returned ruminatingly to his previous position.

If I have not in this incident sufficiently established the youthfulness of the junior partner, I may add briefly that he was just nineteen, that he had early joined the emigration to California, and after one or two previous light-hearted essays at other occu-

pations, for which he was singularly unfitted, he had saved enough to embark on his present venture, still less suited to his temperament. In those adventurous days trades and vocations were not always filled by trained workmen; it was extremely probable that the experienced chemist was already making his success as a gold-miner, with a lawyer and a physician for his partners, and Mr. Kane's inexperienced position was by no means a novel one. A slight knowledge of Latin as a written language, an American schoolboy's acquaintance with chemistry and natural philosophy, were deemed sufficient by his partner, a regular physician, for practical coöperation in the vending of drugs and putting up of prescriptions. He knew the difference between acids and alkalies and the peculiar results which attended their incautious combination. But he was excessively deliberate, painstaking, and cautious. The legend which adorned the desk at the counter, "Physicians' prescriptions carefully prepared," was more than usually true as regarded the adverb. There was no danger of his poisoning anybody through haste or carelessness, but it was possible that an

urgent "case" might have succumbed to the disease while he was putting up the remedy. Nor was his caution entirely passive. In those days the "heroic" practice of medicine was in keeping with the abnormal development of the country; there were "record" doses of calomel and quinine, and he had once or twice incurred the fury of local practitioners by sending back their prescriptions with a modest query.

The far-off clatter of carriage wheels presently arrested his attention; looking down the street, he could see the lights of a hackney carriage advancing towards him. They had already flashed upon the open crossing a block beyond before his vague curiosity changed into an active instinctive presentiment that they were coming to the shop. He withdrew to a more becoming and dignified position behind the counter as the carriage drew up with a jerk before the door.

The driver rolled from his box and opened the carriage door to a woman whom he assisted, between some hysterical exclamations on her part and some equally incoherent explanations of his own, into the shop. Kane saw at a glance that both were under

the influence of liquor, and one, the woman, was disheveled and bleeding about the head. Yet she was elegantly dressed and evidently *en fête*, with one or two "tricolor" knots and ribbons mingled with her finery. Her golden hair, matted and darkened with blood, had partly escaped from her French bonnet and hung heavily over her shoulders. The driver, who was supporting her roughly, and with a familiarity that was part of the incongruous spectacle, was the first to speak.

"Madame le Blank! ye know! Got cut about the head down at the *fête* at South Park! Tried to dance upon the table, and rolled over on some champagne bottles. See? Wants plastering up!"

"Ah brute! Hog! Nozzing of ze kine! Why will you lie? I dance! Ze cowards, fools, traitors zere upset ze table and I fall. I am cut! Ah, my God, how I am cut!"

She stopped suddenly and lapsed heavily against the counter. At which Kane hurried around to support her into the surgery with the one fixed idea in his bewildered mind of getting her out of the shop, and, suggestively, into the domain and under the responsibility of his partner. The hack-

man, apparently relieved and washing his hands of any further complicity in the matter, nodded and smiled, and saying, "I reckon I'll wait outside, pardner," retreated incontinently to his vehicle. To add to Kane's half-ludicrous embarrassment the fair patient herself slightly resisted his support, accused the hackman of "abandoning her," and demanded if Kane knew "zee reason of zees affair," yet she presently lapsed again into the large reclining-chair which he had wheeled forward, with open mouth, half-shut eyes, and a strange *Pierrette* mask of face, combined of the pallor of faintness and chalk, and the rouge of paint and blood. At which Kane's cautiousness again embarrassed him. A little brandy from the bottle labeled "Vini Galli" seemed to be indicated, but his inexperience could not determine if her relaxation was from bloodlessness or the reacting depression of alcohol. In this dilemma he chose a medium course, with aromatic spirits of ammonia, and mixing a diluted quantity in a measuring-glass, poured it between her white lips. A start, a struggle, a cough—a volley of imprecatory French, and the knocking of the glass from his hand fol-

lowed—but she came to! He quickly sponged her head of the half-coagulated blood, and removed a few fragments of glass from a long laceration of the scalp. The shock of the cold water and the appearance of the ensanguined basin frightened her into a momentary passivity. But when Kane found it necessary to cut her hair in the region of the wound in order to apply the adhesive plaster, she again endeavored to rise and grasp the scissors.

"You'll bleed to death if you're not quiet," said the young man with dogged gravity.

Something in his manner impressed her into silence again. He cut whole locks away ruthlessly; he was determined to draw the edges of the wound together with the strip of plaster and stop the bleeding—if he cropped the whole head. His excessive caution for her physical condition did not extend to her superficial adornment. Her yellow tresses lay on the floor, her neck and shoulders were saturated with water from the sponge which he continually applied, until the heated strips of plaster had closed the wound almost hermetically. She whimpered, tears ran down her cheeks; but

so long as it was not blood the young man was satisfied.

In the midst of it he heard the shop door open, and presently the sound of rapping on the counter. Another customer!

Mr. Kane called out, "Wait a moment," and continued his ministrations. After a pause the rapping recommenced. Kane was just securing the last strip of plaster and preserved a preoccupied silence. Then the door flew open abruptly and a figure appeared impatiently on the threshold. It was that of a miner recently returned from the gold diggings — so recently that he evidently had not had time to change his clothes at his adjacent hotel, and stood there in his high boots, duck trousers, and flannel shirt, over which his coat was slung like a hussar's jacket from his shoulder. Kane would have uttered an indignant protest at the intrusion, had not the intruder himself as quickly recoiled with an astonishment and contrition that was beyond the effect of any reproof. He literally gasped at the spectacle before him. A handsomely dressed woman reclining in a chair; lace and jewelry and ribbons depending from her saturated shoulders; tresses of golden hair filling her lap and

lying on the floor; a pail of ruddy water and a sponge at her feet, and a pale young man bending over her head with a spirit lamp and strips of yellow plaster!

"'Scuse me, pard! I was just dropping in; don't you hurry! I kin wait," he stammered, falling back, and then the door closed abruptly behind him.

Kane gathered up the shorn locks, wiped the face and neck of his patient with a clean towel and his own handkerchief, threw her gorgeous opera cloak over her shoulders, and assisted her to rise. She did so, weakly but obediently; she was evidently stunned and cowed in some mysterious way by his material attitude, perhaps, or her sudden realization of her position; at least the contrast between her aggressive entrance into the shop and her subdued preparation for her departure was so remarkable that it affected even Kane's preoccupation.

"There," he said, slightly relaxing his severe demeanor with an encouraging smile, "I think this will do; we've stopped the bleeding. It will probably smart a little as the plaster sets closer. I can send my partner, Dr. Sparlow, to you in the morning."

She looked at him curiously and with a

strange smile. "And zees Doctor Sparrow — eez he like you, M'sieu?"

"He is older, and very well known," said the young man seriously. "I can safely recommend him."

"Ah," she repeated, with a pensive smile which made Kane think her quite pretty. "Ah — he ez older — your Doctor Sparrow — but *you* are strong, M'sieu."

"And," said Kane vaguely, "he will tell you what to do."

"Ah," she repeated again softly, with the same smile, "he will tell me what to do if I shall not know myself. Dat ez good."

Kane had already wrapped her shorn locks in a piece of spotless white paper and tied it up with narrow white ribbon in the dainty fashion dear to druggists' clerks. As he handed it to her she felt in her pocket and produced a handful of gold.

"What shall I pay for zees, M'sieu?"

Kane reddened a little — solely because of his slow arithmetical faculties. Adhesive plaster was cheap — he would like to have charged proportionately for the exact amount he had used; but the division was beyond him! And he lacked the trader's instinct.

"Twenty-five cents, I think," he hazarded briefly.

She started, but smiled again. "Twenty-five cents for all zees — ze medicine, ze strips for ze head, ze hair cut" — she glanced at the paper parcel he had given her — "it is only twenty-five cents?"

"That's all."

He selected from her outstretched palm, with some difficulty, the exact amount, the smallest coin it held. She again looked at him curiously — half confusedly — and moved slowly into the shop. The miner, who was still there, retreated as before with a gaspingly apologetic gesture — even flattening himself against the window to give her sweeping silk flounces freer passage. As she passed into the street with a "Merci, M'sieu, good a'night," and the hackman started from the vehicle to receive her, the miner drew a long breath, and bringing his fist down upon the counter, ejaculated, —

"B'gosh! She's a stunner!"

Kane, a good deal relieved at her departure and the success of his ministrations, smiled benignly.

The stranger again stared after the retreating carriage, looked around the shop,

and even into the deserted surgery, and approached the counter confidentially. "Look yer, pardner. I kem straight from St. Jo, Mizzorri, to Gold Hill — whar I've got a claim — and I reckon this is the first time I ever struck San Francisker. I ain't up to townty ways nohow, and I allow that mebbe I'm rather green. So we'll let that pass! Now look yer!" he added, leaning over the counter with still deeper and even mysterious confidence, "I suppose this yer kind o' thing is the regular go here, eh? nothin' new to *you!* in course no! But to me, pard, it's just fetchin' me! Lifts me clear outer my boots every time! Why, when I popped into that thar room, and saw that lady — all gold, furbelows, and spangles — at twelve o'clock at night, sittin' in that cheer and you a-cuttin' her h'r and swabbin' her head o' blood, and kinder prospectin' for 'indications,' so to speak, and doin' it so kam and indifferent like, I sez to myself, 'Rube, Rube,' sez I, 'this yer's life! city life! San Francisker life! and b' gosh, you've dropped into it!' Now, pard, look yar! don't you answer, ye know, ef it ain't square and above board for me to know; I ain't askin' you to give

the show away, ye know, in the matter of high-toned ladies like that, but" (very mysteriously, and sinking his voice to the lowest confidential pitch, as he put his hand to his ear as if to catch the hushed reply), "what mout hev bin happening, pard?"

Considerably amused at the man's simplicity, Kane replied good-humoredly: "Danced among some champagne bottles on a table at a party, fell and got cut by glass."

The stranger nodded his head slowly and approvingly as he repeated with infinite deliberateness: "Danced on champagne bottles, champagne! you said, pard? at a pahty! Yes!" (musingly and approvingly). "I reckon that's about the gait they take. *She'd* do it."

"Is there anything I can do for you? sorry to have kept you waiting," said Kane, glancing at the clock.

"O *me!* Lord! ye need n't mind me. Why, I should wait for anythin' o' the like o' that, and be just proud to do it! And ye see, I sorter helped myself while you war busy."

"Helped yourself?" said Kane in astonishment.

"Yes, outer that bottle." He pointed to the ammonia bottle, which still stood on the counter. "It seemed to be handy and popular."

"Man! you might have poisoned yourself."

The stranger paused a moment at the idea. "So I mout, I reckon," he said musingly, "that 's so! pizined myself jest ez you was lookin' arter that high-toned case, and kinder bothered you! It 's like me!"

"I mean it required diluting; you ought to have taken it in water," said Kane.

"I reckon! It *did* sorter h'ist me over to the door for a little fresh air at first! seemed rayther scaldy to the lips. But wot of it that *got thar*," he put his hand gravely to his stomach, "did me pow'ful good."

"What was the matter with you?" asked Kane.

"Well, ye see, pard" (confidentially again), "I reckon it 's suthin' along o' my heart. Times it gets to poundin' away like a quartz stamp, and then it stops suddent like, and kinder leaves *me* out too."

Kane looked at him more attentively. He was a strong, powerfully built man with a complexion that betrayed nothing more

serious than the effects of mining cookery. It was evidently a common case of indigestion.

"I don't say it would not have done you some good if properly administered," he replied. "If you like I'll put up a diluted quantity and directions?"

"That's me, every time, pardner!" said the stranger with an accent of relief. "And look yer, don't you stop at that! Ye just put me up some samples like of anythin' you think mout be likely to hit. I'll go in for a fair show, and then meander in every now and then, betwixt times, to let you know. Ye don't mind my drifting in here, do ye? It's about ez likely a place ez I struck since I've left the Sacramento boat, and my hotel, just round the corner. Ye just sample me a bit o' everythin'; don't mind the expense. I'll take *your* word for it. The way you—a young fellow—jest stuck to your work in thar, cool and kam as a woodpecker—not minding how high-toned she was—nor the jewelery and span-gles she had on—jest got me! I sez to myself, 'Rube,' sez I, 'whatever's wrong o' *your* insides, you jes' stick to that feller to set ye right.'"

The junior partner's face reddened as he turned to his shelves ostensibly for consultation. Conscious of his inexperience, the homely praise of even this ignorant man was not ungrateful. He felt, too, that his treatment of the Frenchwoman, though successful, might not be considered remunerative from a business point of view by his partner. He accordingly acted upon the suggestion of the stranger and put up two or three specifics for dyspepsia. They were received with grateful alacrity and the casual display of considerable gold in the stranger's pocket in the process of payment. He was evidently a successful miner.

After bestowing the bottles carefully about his person, he again leaned confidentially towards Kane. "I reckon of course you know this high-toned lady, being in the way of seein' that kind o' folks. I suppose you won't mind telling me, ez a stranger. But" (he added hastily, with a deprecatory wave of his hand), "perhaps ye would."

Mr. Kane, in fact, had hesitated. He knew vaguely and by report that Madame le Blanc was the proprietress of a famous restaurant, over which she had rooms where

private gambling was carried on to a great extent. It was also alleged that she was protected by a famous gambler and a somewhat notorious bully. Mr. Kane's caution suggested that he had no right to expose the reputation of his chance customer. He was silent.

The stranger's face became intensely sympathetic and apologetic. "I see!—not another word, pard! It ain't the square thing to be givin' her away, and I ought n't to hev asked. Well—so long! I reckon I 'll jest drift back to the hotel. I ain't been in San Francisker mor' 'n three hours, and I calkilate, pard, that I've jest seen about ez square a sample of high-toned life as fellers ez haz bin here a year. Well, hastermanyanner—ez the Greasers say. I'll be droppin' in to-morrow. My name 's Reuben Allen o' Mariposa. I know yours; it's on the sign, and it ain't Sparlow."

He cast another lingering glance around the shop, as if loath to leave it, and then slowly sauntered out of the door, pausing in the street a moment, in the glare of the red light, before he faded into darkness. Without knowing exactly why, Kane had an instinct that the stranger knew no one in

San Francisco, and after leaving the shop was going into utter silence and obscurity.

A few moments later Dr. Sparlow returned to relieve his wearied partner. A pushing, active man, he listened impatiently to Kane's account of his youthful practice with Madame le Blanc, without, however, dwelling much on his methods. "You ought to have charged her more," the elder said decisively. "She'd have paid it. She only came here because she was ashamed to go to a big shop in Montgomery Street — and she won't come again."

"But she wants you to see her to-morrow," urged Kane, "and I told her you would!"

"You say it was only a superficial cut?" queried the doctor, "and you closed it? Umph! what can she want to see *me* for?" He paid more attention, however, to the case of the stranger, Allen. "When he comes here again, manage to let me see him." Mr. Kane promised, yet for some indefinable reason he went home that night not quite as well satisfied with himself.

He was much more concerned the next morning when, after relieving the doctor for his regular morning visits, he was star-

tled an hour later by the abrupt return of that gentleman. His face was marked by some excitement and anxiety, which nevertheless struggled with that sense of the ludicrous which Californians in those days imported into most situations of perplexity or catastrophe. Putting his hands deeply into his trousers pockets, he confronted his youthful partner behind the counter.

"How much did you charge that Frenchwoman?" he said gravely.

"Twenty-five cents," said Kane timidly.

"Well, I'd give it back and add two hundred and fifty dollars if she had never entered the shop."

"What's the matter?"

"Her head will be — and a mass of it, in a day, I reckon! Why, man, you put enough plaster on it to clothe and paper the dome of the Capitol! You drew her scalp together so that she could n't shut her eyes without climbing up the bed-post! You mowed her hair off so that she'll have to wear a wig for the next two years — and handed it to her in a beau-ti-ful sealed package! They talk of suing me and killing you out of hand."

"She was bleeding a great deal and

looked faint," said the junior partner; "I thought I ought to stop that."

"And you did — by thunder! Though it might have been better business for the shop if I'd found her a crumbling ruin here, than lathed and plastered in this fashion, over there! However," he added, with a laugh, seeing an angry light in his junior partner's eye, "*she* don't seem to mind it — the cursing all comes from *them*. *She* rather likes your style and praises it — that's what gets me! Did you talk to her much," he added, looking critically at his partner.

"I only told her to sit still or she'd bleed to death," said Kane curtly.

"Humph! — she jabbered something about your being 'strong' and knowing just how to handle her. Well, it can't be helped now. I think I came in time for the worst of it and have drawn their fire. Don't do it again. The next time a woman with a cut head and long hair tackles you, fill up her scalp with lint and tannin, and pack her off to some of the big shops and make *them* pick it out." And with a good-humored nod he started off to finish his interrupted visits.

With a vague sense of remorse, and yet a consciousness of some injustice done him, Mr. Kane resumed his occupation with filters and funnels, and mortars and triturations. He was so gloomily preoccupied that he did not, as usual, glance out of the window, or he would have observed the mining stranger of the previous night before it. It was not until the man's bowed shoulders blocked the light of the doorway that he looked up and recognized him. Kane was in no mood to welcome his appearance. His presence, too, actively recalled the last night's adventure of which he was a witness — albeit a sympathizing one. Kane shrank from the illusions which he felt he would be sure to make. And with his present ill luck, he was by no means sure that his ministrations even to *him* had been any more successful than they had been to the Frenchwoman. But a glance at his good-humored face and kindling eyes removed that suspicion. Nevertheless, he felt somewhat embarrassed and impatient, and perhaps could not entirely conceal it. He forgot that the rudest natures are sometimes the most delicately sensitive to slights, and the stranger had noticed his manner and began apologetically.

"I allowed I'd just drop in anyway to tell ye that these thar pills you giv' me did me a heap o' good so far—though mebbe it's only fair to give the others a show too, which I'm reckoning to do." He paused, and then in a submissive confidence went on: "But first I wanted to hev you excuse me for havin' asked all them questions about that high-toned lady last night, when it warn't none of my business. I am a darned fool."

Mr. Kane instantly saw that it was no use to keep up his attitude of secrecy, or impose upon the ignorant, simple man, and said hurriedly: "Oh no. The lady is very well known. She is the proprietress of a restaurant down the street—a house open to everybody. Her name is Madame le Blanc; you may have heard of her before?"

To his surprise the man exhibited no diminution of interest nor change of sentiment at this intelligence. "Then," he said slowly, "I reckon I might get to see her again. Ye see, Mr. Kane, I rather took a fancy to her general style and gait—arter seein' her in that fix last night. It was rather like them play pictures on the stage. Ye don't think she'd make any

fuss to seein' a rough old ' forty-niner ' like me? "

"Hardly," said Kane, "but there might be some objection from her gentlemen friends," he added, with a smile, — "Jack Lane, a gambler, who keeps a faro bank in her rooms, and Jimmy O'Ryan, a prize-fighter, who is one of her ' chuckers out.' "

His further relation of Madame le Blanc's *entourage* apparently gave the miner no concern. He looked at Kane, nodded, and repeated slowly and appreciatively: "Yes, keeps a gamblin' and faro bank and a prize-fighter — I reckon that might be about her gait and style too. And you say she lives" —

He stopped, for at this moment a man entered the shop quickly, shut the door behind him, and turned the key in the lock. It was done so quickly that Kane instinctively felt that the man had been loitering in the vicinity and had approached from the side street. A single glance at the intruder's face and figure showed him that it was the bully of whom he had just spoken. He had seen that square, brutal face once before, confronting the police in a riot, and had not forgotten it. But to-

day, with the flush of liquor on it, it had an impatient awkwardness and confused embarrassment that he could not account for. He did not comprehend that the genuine bully is seldom deliberate of attack, and is obliged — in common with many of the combative lower animals — to lash himself into a previous fury of provocation. This probably saved him, as perhaps some instinctive feeling that he was in no immediate danger kept him cool. He remained standing quietly behind the counter. Allen glanced around carelessly, looking at the shelves.

The silence of the two men apparently increased the ruffian's rage and embarrassment. Suddenly he leaped into the air with a whoop and clumsily executed a negro double shuffle on the floor, which jarred the glasses — yet was otherwise so singularly ineffective and void of purpose that he stopped in the midst of it and had to content himself with glaring at Kane.

"Well," said Kane quietly, "what does all this mean? What do you want here?"

"What does it mean?" repeated the bully, finding his voice in a high falsetto, designed to imitate Kane's. "It means

I'm going to play merry h—ll with this shop! It means I'm goin' to clean it out and the blank hair-cuttin' blank that keeps it. What do I want here? Well—what I want I intend to help myself to, and all h—ll can't stop me! And" (working himself to the striking point) "who the blank are you to ask me?" He sprang towards the counter, but at the same moment Allen seemed to slip almost imperceptibly and noiselessly between them, and Kane found himself confronted only by the miner's broad back.

"Hol' yer hosses, stranger," said Allen slowly, as the ruffian suddenly collided with his impassive figure. "I'm a sick man comin' in yer for medicine. I've got somethin' wrong with my heart, and goin's on like this yer kinder sets it to thumpin'."

"Blank you and your blank heart!" screamed the bully, turning in a fury of amazement and contempt at this impotent interruption. "Who"—but his voice stopped. Allen's powerful right arm had passed over his head and shoulders like a steel hoop, and pinioned his elbows against his sides. Held rigidly upright, he attempted to kick, but Allen's right leg here

advanced, and firmly held his lower limbs against the counter that shook to his struggles and blasphemous outcries. Allen turned quietly to Kane, and, with a gesture of his unemployed arm, said confidentially:

"Would ye mind passing me down that ar Romantic Spirits of Ammonyer ye gave me last night?"

Kane caught the idea, and handed him the bottle.

"Thar," said Allen, taking out the stopper and holding the pungent spirit against the bully's dilated nostrils and vociferous mouth, "thar, smell that, and taste it, it will do ye good; it was powerful kammin' to *me* last night."

The ruffian gasped, coughed, choked, but his blaspheming voice died away in a suffocating hiccough.

"Thar," continued Allen, as his now subdued captive relaxed his struggling, "ye 'r' better, and so am I. It's quieter here now, and ye ain't affectin' my heart so bad. A little fresh air will make us both all right." He turned again to Kane in his former subdued confidential manner.

"Would ye mind openin' that door?"

Kane flew to the door, unlocked it, and

held it wide open. The bully again began to struggle, but a second inhalation of the hartshorn quelled him, and enabled his captor to drag him to the door. As they emerged upon the sidewalk, the bully, with a final desperate struggle, freed his arm and grasped his pistol at his hip-pocket, but at the same moment Allen deliberately caught his hand, and with a powerful side throw cast him on the pavement, retaining the weapon in his own hand. "I've one of my own," he said to the prostrate man, "but I reckon I'll keep this yer too, until you're better."

The crowd that had collected quickly, recognizing the notorious and discomfited bully, were not of a class to offer him any sympathy, and he slunk away followed by their jeers. Allen returned quietly to the shop. Kane was profuse in his thanks, and yet oppressed with his simple friend's fatuous admiration for a woman who could keep such ruffians in her employ. "You know who that man was, I suppose?" he said.

"I reckon it was that 'er prize-fighter belongin' to that high-toned lady," returned Allen simply. "But he don't know

anything about *rastlin'*, b' gosh; only that I was afraid o' bringin' on that heart trouble, I mout hev hurt him bad."

"They think" — hesitated Kane, "that — I — was rough in my treatment of that woman and maliciously cut off her hair. This attack was revenge — or" — he hesitated still more, as he remembered Dr. Sparlow's indication of the woman's feeling — "or that bully's idea of revenge."

"I see," nodded Allen, opening his small sympathetic eyes on Kane with an exasperating air of secrecy — "just jealousy."

Kane reddened in sheer hopelessness of explanation. "No; it was learning his wages, as he thought."

"Never ye mind, pard," said Allen confidentially. "I'll set 'em both right. Ye see, this sorter gives me a show to call at that thar restaurant and give *him* back his six-shooter, and set her on the right trail for you. Why, Lordy! I was here when you was fixin' her — I'm testimony o' the way you did it — and she'll remember me. I'll sorter waltz round thar this afternoon. But I reckon I won't be keepin' *you* from your work any longer. And look yar! — I say, pard! — this is seein' life in 'Frisco

—ain't it? Gosh! I've had more high times in this very shop in *two* days, than I've had in two years of St. Jo. So long, Mr. Kane!" He waved his hand, lounged slowly out of the shop, gave a parting glance up the street, passed the window, and was gone.

The next day being a half-holiday for Kane, he did not reach the shop until afternoon. "Your mining friend Allen has been here," said Doctor Sparlow. "I took the liberty of introducing myself, and induced him to let me carefully examine him. He was a little shy, and I am sorry for it, as I fear he has some serious organic trouble with his heart and ought to have a more thorough examination." Seeing Kane's unaffected concern, he added, "You might influence him to do so. He's a good fellow and ought to take some care of himself. By the way, he told me to tell you that he'd seen Madame le Blanc and made it all right about you. He seems to be quite infatuated with the woman."

"I'm sorry he ever saw her," said Kane bitterly.

"Well, his seeing her seems to have saved the shop from being smashed up, and

you from getting a punched head," returned the Doctor with a laugh. "He's no fool—yet it's a freak of human nature that a simple hayseed like that—a man who's lived in the backwoods all his life, is likely to be the first to tumble before a pot of French rouge like her."

Indeed, in a couple of weeks, there was no further doubt of Mr. Reuben Allen's infatuation. He dropped into the shop frequently on his way to and from the restaurant, where he now regularly took his meals; he spent his evenings in gambling in its private room. Yet Kane was by no means sure that he was losing his money there unfairly, or that he was used as a pigeon by the proprietress and her friends. The bully O'Ryan was turned away; Sparlow grimly suggested that Allen had simply taken his place, but Kane ingeniously retorted that the Doctor was only piqued because Allen had evaded his professional treatment. Certainly the patient had never consented to another examination, although he repeatedly and gravely bought medicines, and was a generous customer. Once or twice Kane thought it his duty to caution Allen against his new friends and enlighten him as to

Madame le Blanc's reputation, but his suggestions were received with a good-humored submission that was either the effect of unbelief or of perfect resignation to the fact, and he desisted. One morning Dr. Sparlow said cheerfully:—

"Would you like to hear the last thing about your friend and the Frenchwoman? The boys can't account for her singling out a fellow like that for her friend, so they say that the night that she cut herself at the *fête* and dropped in here for assistance, she found nobody here but Allen—a chance customer! That it was *he* who cut off her hair and bound up her wounds in that sincere fashion, and she believed he had saved her life." The Doctor grinned maliciously as he added: "And as that's the way history is written you see your reputation is safe."

It may have been a month later that San Francisco was thrown into a paroxysm of horror and indignation over the assassination of a prominent citizen and official in the gambling-rooms of Madame le Blanc, at the hands of a notorious gambler. The gambler had escaped, but in one of those rare spasms of vengeful morality which

sometimes overtakes communities who have too long winked at and suffered the existence of evil, the fair proprietress and her whole *entourage* were arrested and haled before the coroner's jury at the inquest. The greatest excitement prevailed; it was said that if the jury failed in their duty, the Vigilance Committee had arranged for the destruction of the establishment and the deportation of its inmates. The crowd that had collected around the building was reinforced by Kane and Dr. Sparlow, who had closed their shop in the next block to attend. When Kane had fought his way into the building and the temporary court, held in the splendidly furnished gambling saloon, whose gilded mirrors reflected the eager faces of the crowd, the Chief of Police was giving his testimony in a formal official manner, impressive only for its relentless and impassive revelation of the character and antecedents of the proprietress. The house had been long under the espionage of the police; Madame le Blanc had a dozen aliases; she was "wanted" in New Orleans, in New York, in Havana! It was in *her* house that Dyer, the bank clerk, committed suicide; it was there that Colonel Hooley

was set upon by her bully, O'Ryan; it was she — Kane heard with reddening cheeks — who defied the police with riotous conduct at a *fête* two months ago. As he coolly recited the counts of this shameful indictment, Kane looked eagerly around for Allen, whom he knew had been arrested as a witness. How would *he* take this terrible disclosure? He was sitting with the others, his arm thrown over the back of his chair, and his good-humored face turned towards the woman, in his old confidential attitude. *She*, gorgeously dressed, painted, but unblushing, was cool, collected, and cynical.

The Coroner next called the only witness of the actual tragedy, "Reuben Allen." The man did not move nor change his position. The summons was repeated; a policeman touched him on the shoulder. There was a pause, and the officer announced: "He has fainted, your Honor!"

"Is there a physician present?" asked the Coroner.

Sparlow edged his way quickly to the front. "I'm a medical man," he said to the Coroner, as he passed quickly to the still, upright, immovable figure and knelt beside it with his head upon his heart.

There was an awed silence as, after a pause, he rose slowly to his feet.

"The witness is a patient, your Honor, whom I examined some weeks ago and found suffering from valvular disease of the heart. He is dead."

THREE VAGABONDS OF TRINIDAD

“OH! it’s you, is it?” said the Editor.

The Chinese boy to whom the colloquialism was addressed answered literally, after his habit: —

“Allee same Li Tee; me no changee. Me no ollee China boy.”

“That’s so,” said the Editor with an air of conviction. “I don’t suppose there’s another imp like you in all Trinidad County. Well, next time don’t scratch outside there like a gopher, but come in.”

“Lass time,” suggested Li Tee blandly, “me tap tappee. You no like tap tappee. You say, alle same dam woodpeckel.”

It was quite true — the highly sylvan surroundings of the Trinidad “Sentinel” office — a little clearing in a pine forest — and its attendant fauna, made these signals confusing. An accurate imitation of a woodpecker was also one of Li Tee’s accomplishments.

The Editor without replying finished the

note he was writing; at which Li Tee, as if struck by some coincident recollection, lifted up his long sleeve, which served him as a pocket, and carelessly shook out a letter on the table like a conjuring trick. The Editor, with a reproachful glance at him, opened it. It was only the ordinary request of an agricultural subscriber — one Johnson — that the Editor would “notice” a giant radish grown by the subscriber and sent by the bearer.

“Where’s the radish, Li Tee?” said the Editor suspiciously.

“No hab got. Ask Mellikan boy.”

“What?”

Here Li Tee condescended to explain that on passing the schoolhouse he had been set upon by the schoolboys, and that in the struggle the big radish — being, like most such monstrosities of the quick Californian soil, merely a mass of organized water — was “mashed” over the head of some of his assailants. The Editor, painfully aware of these regular persecutions of his errand boy, and perhaps realizing that a radish which could not be used as a bludgeon was not of a sustaining nature, forebore any reproof. “But I cannot notice what I have

n't seen, Li Tee," he said good-humor-
edly.

"S'pose you lie — allee same as Johnson," suggested Li with equal cheerfulness. "He foolee you with lotten stuff — you foolee Mellikan man, allee same."

The Editor preserved a dignified silence until he had addressed his letter. "Take this to Mrs. Martin," he said, handing it to the boy; "and mind you keep clear of the schoolhouse. Don't go by the Flat either if the men are at work, and don't, if you value your skin, pass Flanigan's shanty, where you set off those firecrackers and nearly burnt him out the other day. Look out for Barker's dog at the crossing, and keep off the main road if the tunnel men are coming over the hill." Then remembering that he had virtually closed all the ordinary approaches to Mrs. Martin's house, he added, "Better go round by the woods, where you won't meet *any one*."

The boy darted off through the open door, and the Editor stood for a moment looking regretfully after him. He liked his little *protégé* ever since that unfortunate child — a waif from a Chinese wash-house — was impounded by some indignant miners

for bringing home a highly imperfect and insufficient washing, and kept as hostage for a more proper return of the garments. Unfortunately, another gang of miners, equally aggrieved, had at the same time looted the wash-house and driven off the occupants, so that Li Tee remained unclaimed. For a few weeks he became a sporting appendage of the miners' camp; the stolid butt of good-humored practical jokes, the victim alternately of careless indifference or of extravagant generosity. He received kicks and half-dollars intermit- tently, and pocketed both with stoical fortitude. But under this treatment he pre- sently lost the docility and frugality which was part of his inheritance, and began to put his small wits against his tormentors, until they grew tired of their own mischief and his. But they knew not what to do with him. His pretty nankeen-yellow skin debarred him from the white "public school," while, although as a heathen he might have reasonably claimed attention from the Sabbath-school, the parents who cheerfully gave their contributions to the heathen *abroad*, objected to him as a com- panion of their children in the church at

home. At this juncture the Editor offered to take him into his printing office as a "devil." For a while he seemed to be endeavoring, in his old literal way, to act up to that title. He inked everything but the press. He scratched Chinese characters of an abusive import on "leads," printed them, and stuck them about the office; he put "punk" in the foreman's pipe, and had been seen to swallow small type merely as a diabolical recreation. As a messenger he was fleet of foot, but uncertain of delivery. Some time previously the Editor had enlisted the sympathies of Mrs. Martin, the good-natured wife of a farmer, to take him in her household on trial, but on the third day Li Tee had run away. Yet the Editor had not despaired, and it was to urge her to a second attempt that he dispatched that letter.

He was still gazing abstractedly into the depths of the wood when he was conscious of a slight movement — but no sound — in a clump of hazel near him, and a stealthy figure glided from it. He at once recognized it as "Jim," a well-known drunken Indian vagrant of the settlement — tied to its civilization by the single link of "fire

water," for which he forsook equally the Reservation where it was forbidden and his own camps where it was unknown. Unconscious of his silent observer, he dropped upon all fours, with his ear and nose alternately to the ground like some tracking animal. Then having satisfied himself, he rose, and bending forward in a dogged trot, made a straight line for the woods. He was followed a few seconds later by his dog—a slinking, rough, wolf-like brute, whose superior instinct, however, made him detect the silent presence of some alien humanity in the person of the Editor, and to recognize it with a yelp of habit, anticipatory of the stone that he knew was always thrown at him.

"That's cute," said a voice, "but it's just what I expected all along."

The Editor turned quickly. His foreman was standing behind him, and had evidently noticed the whole incident.

"It's what I allus said," continued the man. "That boy and that Injin are thick as thieves. Ye can't see one without the other—and they've got their little tricks and signals by which they follow each other. T'other day when you was kalkilatin' Li

Tee was doin' your errands I tracked him out on the marsh, just by followin' that ornery, pizenous dog o' Jim's. There was the whole caboodle of 'em — including Jim — campin' out, and eatin' raw fish that Jim had ketched, and green stuff they had both sneaked outer Johnson's garden. Mrs. Martin may *take* him, but she won't keep him long while Jim's round. What makes Li foller that blamed old Injin soaker, and what makes Jim, who, at least, is a 'Merican, take up with a furrin' heathen, just gets me."

The Editor did not reply. He had heard something of this before. Yet, after all, why should not these equal outcasts of civilization cling together!

Li Tee's stay with Mrs. Martin was brief. His departure was hastened by an untoward event — apparently ushered in, as in the case of other great calamities, by a mysterious portent in the sky. One morning an extraordinary bird of enormous dimensions was seen approaching from the horizon, and eventually began to hover over the devoted town. Careful scrutiny of this ominous fowl, however, revealed the fact

that it was a monstrous Chinese kite, in the shape of a flying dragon. The spectacle imparted considerable liveliness to the community, which, however, presently changed to some concern and indignation. It appeared that the kite was secretly constructed by Li Tee in a secluded part of Mrs. Martin's clearing, but when it was first tried by him he found that through some error of design it required a tail of unusual proportions. This he hurriedly supplied by the first means he found — Mrs. Martin's clothes-line, with part of the weekly wash depending from it. This fact was not at first noticed by the ordinary sightseer, although the tail seemed peculiar — yet, perhaps, not more peculiar than a dragon's tail ought to be. But when the actual theft was discovered and reported through the town, a vivacious interest was created, and spy-glasses were used to identify the various articles of apparel still hanging on that ravished clothes-line. These garments, in the course of their slow disengagement from the clothes-pins through the gyrations of the kite, impartially distributed themselves over the town — one of Mrs. Martin's stockings falling upon the veranda of the Polka Saloon,

and the other being afterwards discovered on the belfry of the First Methodist Church — to the scandal of the congregation. It would have been well if the result of Li Tee's invention had ended here. Alas! the kite-flyer and his accomplice, "Injin Jim," were tracked by means of the kite's tell-tale cord to a lonely part of the marsh and rudely dispossessed of their charge by Deacon Hornblower and a constable. Unfortunately, the captors overlooked the fact that the kite-flyers had taken the precaution of making a "half-turn" of the stout cord around a log to ease the tremendous pull of the kite — whose power the captors had not reckoned upon — and the Deacon incautiously substituted his own body for the log. A singular spectacle is said to have then presented itself to the on-lookers. The Deacon was seen to be running wildly by leaps and bounds over the marsh after the kite, closely followed by the constable in equally wild efforts to restrain him by tugging at the end of the line. The extraordinary race continued to the town until the constable fell, losing his hold of the line. This seemed to impart a singular specific levity to the Deacon, who, to the astonishment of

everybody, incontinently sailed up into a tree! When he was succored and cut down from the demoniac kite, he was found to have sustained a dislocation of the shoulder, and the constable was severely shaken. By that one infelicitous stroke the two outcasts made an enemy of the Law and the Gospel as represented in Trinidad County. It is to be feared also that the ordinary emotional instinct of a frontier community, to which they were now simply abandoned, was as little to be trusted. In this dilemma they disappeared from the town the next day — no one knew where. A pale blue smoke rising from a lonely island in the bay for some days afterwards suggested their possible refuge. But nobody greatly cared. The sympathetic mediation of the Editor was characteristically opposed by Mr. Parkin Skinner, a prominent citizen:—

“It’s all very well for you to talk sentiment about niggers, Chinamen, and Injins, and you fellers can laugh about the Deacon being snatched up to heaven like Elijah in that blamed Chinese chariot of a kite — but I kin tell you, gentlemen, that this is a white man’s country! Yes, sir, you can’t get over it! The nigger of every descrip-

tion — yeller, brown, or black, call him ‘Chinese,’ ‘Injin,’ or ‘Kanaka,’ or what you like — hez to clar off of God’s footstool when the Anglo-Saxon gets started! It stands to reason that they can’t live alongside o’ printin’ presses, M’Cormick’s reapers, and the Bible! Yes, sir! the Bible; and Deacon Hornblower kin prove it to you. It’s our manifest destiny to clar them out — that ’s what we was put here for — and it’s just the work we’ve got to do!”

I have ventured to quote Mr. Skinner’s stirring remarks to show that probably Jim and Li Tee ran away only in anticipation of a possible lynching, and to prove that advanced sentiments of this high and ennobling nature really obtained forty years ago in an ordinary American frontier town which did not then dream of Expansion and Empire!

Howbeit, Mr. Skinner did not make allowance for mere human nature. One morning Master Bob Skinner, his son, aged twelve, evaded the schoolhouse, and started in an old Indian “dug-out” to invade the island of the miserable refugees. His purpose was not clearly defined to himself, but

was to be modified by circumstances. He would either capture Li Tee and Jim, or join them in their lawless existence. He had prepared himself for either event by surreptitiously borrowing his father's gun. He also carried victuals, having heard that Jim ate grasshoppers and Li Tee rats, and misdoubting his own capacity for either diet. He paddled slowly, well in shore, to be secure from observation at home, and then struck out boldly in his leaky canoe for the island—a tufted, tussocky shred of the marshy promontory torn off in some tidal storm. It was a lovely day, the bay being barely ruffled by the afternoon “trades;” but as he neared the island he came upon the swell from the bar and the thunders of the distant Pacific, and grew a little frightened. The canoe, losing way, fell into the trough of the swell, shipping salt water, still more alarming to the prairie-bred boy. Forgetting his plan of a stealthy invasion, he shouted lustily as the helpless and water-logged boat began to drift past the island; at which a lithe figure emerged from the reeds, threw off a tattered blanket, and slipped noiselessly, like some animal, into the water. It was Jim, who, half

wading, half swimming, brought the canoe and boy ashore. Master Skinner at once gave up the idea of invasion, and concluded to join the refugees.

This was easy in his defenceless state, and his manifest delight in their rude encampment and gypsy life, although he had been one of Li Tee's oppressors in the past. But that stolid pagan had a philosophical indifference which might have passed for Christian forgiveness, and Jim's native reticence seemed like assent. And, possibly, in the minds of these two vagabonds there might have been a natural sympathy for this other truant from civilization, and some delicate flattery in the fact that Master Skinner was not driven out, but came of his own accord. Howbeit, they fished together, gathered cranberries on the marsh, shot a wild duck and two plovers, and when Master Skinner assisted in the cooking of their fish in a conical basket sunk in the ground, filled with water, heated by rolling red-hot stones from their drift-wood fire into the buried basket, the boy's felicity was supreme. And what an afternoon! To lie, after this feast, on their bellies in the grass, replete like animals, hidden from

everything but the sunshine above them; so quiet that gray clouds of sandpipers settled fearlessly around them, and a shining brown muskrat slipped from the ooze within a few feet of their faces — was to feel themselves a part of the wild life in earth and sky. Not that their own predatory instincts were hushed by this divine peace; that intermitting black spot upon the water, declared by the Indian to be a seal, the stealthy glide of a yellow fox in the ambush of a callow brood of mallards, the momentary straying of an elk from the upland upon the borders of the marsh, awoke their tingling nerves to the happy but fruitless chase. And when night came, too soon, and they pigged together around the warm ashes of their camp-fire, under the low lodge poles of their wigwan of dried mud, reeds, and driftwood, with the combined odors of fish, wood-smoke, and the warm salt breath of the marsh in their nostrils, they slept contentedly. The distant lights of the settlement went out one by one, the stars came out, very large and very silent, to take their places. The barking of a dog on the nearest point was followed by another farther inland. But Jim's dog, curled at the

feet of his master, did not reply. What had *he* to do with civilization?

The morning brought some fear of consequences to Master Skinner, but no abatement of his resolve not to return. But here he was oddly combated by Li Tee. "S'pose you go back allee same. You tellee fam'lee canoe go topside down — you plentee swimee to bush. Allee night in bush. Housee big way off — how can get? Sabe?"

"And I'll leave the gun, and tell Dad that when the canoe upset the gun got drowned," said the boy eagerly.

Li Tee nodded.

"And come again Saturday, and bring more powder and shot and a bottle for Jim," said Master Skinner excitedly.

"Good!" grunted the Indian.

Then they ferried the boy over to the peninsula, and set him on a trail across the marshes, known only to themselves, which would bring him home. And when the Editor the next morning chronicled among his news, "Adrift on the Bay — A School-boy's Miraculous Escape," he knew as little what part his missing Chinese errand boy had taken in it as the rest of his readers.

Meantime the two outcasts returned to their island camp. It may have occurred to them that a little of the sunlight had gone from it with Bob; for they were in a dull, stupid way fascinated by the little white tyrant who had broken bread with them. He had been delightfully selfish and frankly brutal to them, as only a schoolboy could be, with the addition of the consciousness of his superior race. Yet they each longed for his return, although he was seldom mentioned in their scanty conversation — carried on in monosyllables, each in his own language, or with some common English word, or more often restricted solely to signs. By a delicate flattery, when they did speak of him it was in what they considered to be his own language.

“Boston boy, plenty like catchee *him*,” Jim would say, pointing to a distant swan. Or Li Tee, hunting a striped water snake from the reeds, would utter stolidly, “Melikan boy no likee snake.” Yet the next two days brought some trouble and physical discomfort to them. Bob had consumed, or wasted, all their provisions — and, still more unfortunately, his righteous visit, his

gun, and his superabundant animal spirits had frightened away the game, which their habitual quiet and taciturnity had beguiled into trustfulness. They were half starved, but they did not blame him. It would come all right when he returned. They counted the days, Jim with secret notches on the long pole, Li Tee with a string of copper "cash" he always kept with him. The eventful day came at last, — a warm autumn day, patched with inland fog like blue smoke and smooth, tranquil, open surfaces of wood and sea; but to their waiting, confident eyes the boy came not out of either. They kept a stolid silence all that day until night fell, when Jim said, "Mebbe Boston boy go dead." Li Tee nodded. It did not seem possible to these two heathens that anything else could prevent the Christian child from keeping his word.

After that, by the aid of the canoe, they went much on the marsh, hunting apart, but often meeting on the trail which Bob had taken, with grunts of mutual surprise. These suppressed feelings, never made known by word or gesture, at last must have found vicarious outlet in the taciturn dog, who so far forgot his usual discretion

as to once or twice seat himself on the water's edge and indulge in a fit of howling. It had been a custom of Jim's on certain days to retire to some secluded place, where, folded in his blanket, with his back against a tree, he remained motionless for hours. In the settlement this had been usually referred to the after effects of drink, known as the "horrors," but Jim had explained it by saying it was "when his heart was bad." And now it seemed, by these gloomy abstractions, that "his heart was bad" very often. And then the long withheld rains came one night on the wings of a fierce southwester, beating down their frail lodge and scattering it abroad, quenching their camp-fire, and rolling up the bay until it invaded their reedy island and hissed in their ears. It drove the game from Jim's gun; it tore the net and scattered the bait of Li Tee, the fisherman. Cold and half starved in heart and body, but more dogged and silent than ever, they crept out in their canoe into the storm-tossed bay, barely escaping with their miserable lives to the marshy peninsula. Here, on their enemy's ground, skulking in the rushes, or lying close behind tussocks, they

at last reached the fringe of forest below the settlement. Here, too, sorely pressed by hunger, and doggedly reckless of consequences, they forgot their caution, and a flight of teal fell to Jim's gun on the very outskirts of the settlement.

It was a fatal shot, whose echoes awoke the forces of civilization against them. For it was heard by a logger in his hut near the marsh, who, looking out, had seen Jim pass. A careless, good-natured frontiersman, he might have kept the outcasts' mere presence to himself; but there was that damning shot! An Indian with a gun! That weapon, contraband of law, with dire fines and penalties to whoso sold or gave it to him! A thing to be looked into—some one to be punished! An Indian with a weapon that made him the equal of the white! Who was safe? He hurried to town to lay his information before the constable, but, meeting Mr. Skinner, imparted the news to him. The latter pooh-poohed the constable, who he alleged had not yet discovered the whereabouts of Jim, and suggested that a few armed citizens should make the chase themselves. The fact was that Mr. Skinner, never quite satisfied in

his mind with his son's account of the loss of the gun, had put two and two together, and was by no means inclined to have his own gun possibly identified by the legal authority. Moreover, he went home and at once attacked Master Bob with such vigor and so highly colored a description of the crime he had committed, and the penalties attached to it, that Bob confessed. More than that, I grieve to say that Bob lied. The Indian had "stoled his gun," and threatened his life if he divulged the theft. He told how he was ruthlessly put ashore, and compelled to take a trail only known to them to reach his home. In two hours it was reported throughout the settlement that the infamous Jim had added robbery with violence to his illegal possession of the weapon. The secret of the island and the trail over the marsh was told only to a few.

Meantime it had fared hard with the fugitives. Their nearness to the settlement prevented them from lighting a fire, which might have revealed their hiding-place, and they crept together, shivering all night in a clump of hazel. Scared thence by passing but unsuspecting wayfarers wandering off the trail, they lay part of the next day and

night amid some tussocks of salt grass, blown on by the cold sea-breeze; chilled, but securely hidden from sight. Indeed, thanks to some mysterious power they had of utter immobility, it was wonderful how they could efface themselves, through quiet and the simplest environment. The lee side of a straggling vine in the meadow, or even the thin ridge of cast-up drift on the shore, behind which they would lie for hours motionless, was a sufficient barrier against prying eyes. In this occupation they no longer talked together, but followed each other with the blind instinct of animals — yet always unerringly, as if conscious of each other's plans. Strangely enough, it was the *real* animal alone — their nameless dog — who now betrayed impatience and a certain human infirmity of temper. The concealment they were resigned to, the sufferings they mutely accepted, he alone resented! When certain scents or sounds, imperceptible to their senses, were blown across their path, he would, with bristling back, snarl himself into guttural and strangled fury. Yet, in their apathy, even this would have passed them unnoticed, but that on the second night he disappeared

suddenly, returning after two hours' absence with bloody jaws — replete, but still slinking and snappish. It was only in the morning that, creeping on their hands and knees through the stubble, they came upon the torn and mangled carcass of a sheep. The two men looked at each other without speaking — they knew what this act of rapine meant to themselves. It meant a fresh hue and cry after them — it meant that their starving companion had helped to draw the net closer round them. The Indian grunted, Li Tee smiled vacantly; but with their knives and fingers they finished what the dog had begun, and became equally culpable. But that they were heathens, they could not have achieved a delicate ethical responsibility in a more Christian-like way.

Yet the rice-fed Li Tee suffered most in their privations. His habitual apathy increased with a certain physical lethargy which Jim could not understand. When they were apart he sometimes found Li Tee stretched on his back with an odd stare in his eyes, and once, at a distance, he thought he saw a vague thin vapor drift from where the Chinese boy was lying and vanish as he

approached. When he tried to arouse him there was a weak drawl in his voice and a drug-like odor in his breath. Jim dragged him to a more substantial shelter, a thicket of alder. It was dangerously near the frequented road, but a vague idea had sprung up in Jim's now troubled mind that, equal vagabonds though they were, Li Tee had more claims upon civilization, through those of his own race who were permitted to live among the white men, and were not hunted to "reservations" and confined there like Jim's people. If Li Tee was "heap sick," other Chinamen might find and nurse him. As for Li Tee, he had lately said, in a more lucid interval: "Me go dead — allee samee Mellikan boy. You go dead too — allee samee," and then lay down again with a glassy stare in his eyes. Far from being frightened at this, Jim attributed his condition to some enchantment that Li Tee had evoked from one of his gods — just as he himself had seen "medicine-men" of his own tribe fall into strange trances, and was glad that the boy no longer suffered. The day advanced, and Li Tee still slept. Jim could hear the church bells ringing; he knew it was Sunday — the day on which he

was hustled from the main street by the constable; the day on which the shops were closed, and the drinking saloons open only at the back door. The day whereon no man worked — and for that reason, though he knew it not, the day selected by the ingenious Mr. Skinner and a few friends as especially fitting and convenient for a chase of the fugitives. The bell brought no suggestion of this — though the dog snapped under his breath and stiffened his spine. And then he heard another sound, far off and vague, yet one that brought a flash into his murky eye, that lit up the heaviness of his Hebraic face, and even showed a slight color in his high cheek-bones. He lay down on the ground, and listened with suspended breath. He heard it now distinctly. It was the Boston boy calling, and the word he was calling was “Jim.”

Then the fire dropped out of his eyes as he turned with his usual stolidity to where Li Tee was lying. Him he shook, saying briefly: “Boston boy come back!” But there was no reply, the dead body rolled over inertly under his hand; the head fell back, and the jaw dropped under the pinched yellow face. The Indian gazed at

him slowly, and then gravely turned again in the direction of the voice. Yet his dull mind was perplexed, for, blended with that voice were other sounds like the tread of clumsily stealthy feet. But again the voice called "Jim!" and raising his hands to his lips he gave a low whoop in reply. This was followed by silence, when suddenly he heard the voice—the boy's voice—once again, this time very near him, saying eagerly:—

"There he is!"

Then the Indian knew all. His face, however, did not change as he took up his gun, and a man stepped out of the thicket into the trail:—

"Drop that gun, you d—d Injin."

The Indian did not move.

"Drop it, I say!"

The Indian remained erect and motionless.

A rifle shot broke from the thicket. At first it seemed to have missed the Indian, and the man who had spoken cocked his own rifle. But the next moment the tall figure of Jim collapsed where he stood into a mere blanketed heap.

The man who had fired the shot walked

towards the heap with the easy air of a conqueror. But suddenly there arose before him an awful phantom, the incarnation of savagery—a creature of blazing eyeballs, flashing tusks, and hot carnivorous breath. He had barely time to cry out “A wolf!” before its jaws met in his throat, and they rolled together on the ground.

But it was no wolf—as a second shot proved—only Jim’s slinking dog; the only one of the outcasts who at that supreme moment had gone back to his original nature.

A VISION OF THE FOUNTAIN

MR. JACKSON POTTER halted before the little cottage, half shop, half hostelry, opposite the great gates of Domesday Park, where tickets of admission to that venerable domain were sold. Here Mr. Potter revealed his nationality as a Western American, not only in his accent, but in a certain half-humorous, half-practical questioning of the ticket-seller—as that quasi-official stamped his ticket—which was nevertheless delivered with such unfailing good-humor, and such frank suggestiveness of the perfect equality of the ticket-seller and the well-dressed stranger that, far from producing any irritation, it attracted the pleased attention not only of the official, but his wife and daughter and a customer. Possibly the good looks of the stranger had something to do with it. Jackson Potter was a singularly handsome young fellow, with one of those ideal faces and figures sometimes seen in Western frontier villages, attributable to no ancestor, but evolved

possibly from novels and books devoured by ancestresses in the long solitary winter evenings of their lonely cabins on the frontier. A beardless, classical head, covered by short flocculent blonde curls, poised on a shapely neck and shoulders, was more Greek in outline than suggestive of any ordinary American type. Finally, after having thoroughly amused his small audience, he lifted his straw hat to the "ladies," and lounged out across the road to the gateway. Here he paused, consulting his guide-book, and read aloud: "St. John's Gateway. This massive structure, according to Leland, was built in" — murmured — "never mind when; we 'll pass St. John," marked the page with his pencil, and tendering his ticket to the gate-keeper, heard, with some satisfaction, that, as there were no other visitors just then, and as the cicerone only accompanied *parties*, he would be left to himself, and at once plunged into a by-path.

It was that loveliest of rare creations — a hot summer day in England, with all the dampness of that sea-blown isle wrung out of it, exhaled in the quivering blue vault overhead, or passing as dim wraiths in the

distant wood, and all the long-matured growth of that great old garden vivified and made resplendent by the fervid sun. The ashes of dead and gone harvests, even the dust of those who had for ages wrought in it, turned again and again through incessant cultivation, seemed to move and live once more in that present sunshine. All color appeared to be deepened and mellowed, until even the very shadows of the trees were as velvety as the sward they fell upon. The prairie-bred Potter, accustomed to the youthful caprices and extravagances of his own virgin soil, could not help feeling the influence of the ripe restraints of this.

As he glanced through the leaves across green sunlit spaces to the ivy-clad ruins of Domesday Abbey, which seemed itself a growth of the very soil, he murmured to himself: "Things had been made mighty comfortable for folks here, you bet!" Forgotten books he had read as a boy, scraps of school histories, or rarer novels, came back to him as he walked along, and peopled the solitude about him with their heroes.

Nevertheless, it was unmistakably hot —

a heat homelike in its intensity, yet of a different effect, throwing him into languid reverie rather than filling his veins with fire. Secure in his seclusion in the leafy chase, he took off his jacket and rambled on in his shirt sleeves. Through the opening he presently saw the abbey again, with the restored wing where the noble owner lived for two or three weeks in the year, but now given over to the prevailing solitude. And then, issuing from the chase, he came upon a broad, moss-grown terrace. Before him stretched a tangled and luxuriant wilderness of shrubs and flowers, darkened by cypress and cedars of Lebanon; its dim depths illuminated by dazzling white statues, vases, trellises, and paved paths, choked and lost in the trailing growths of years of abandonment and forgetfulness. He consulted his guide-book again. It was the "old Italian garden," constructed under the design of a famous Italian gardener by the third duke; but its studied formality being displeasing to his successor, it was allowed to fall into picturesque decay and negligent profusion, which were not, however, disturbed by later descendants, — a fact deplored by the artistic

writer of the guide-book, who mournfully called attention to the rare beauty of the marble statues, urns, and fountains, ruined by neglect, although one or two of the rarer objects had been removed to Deep Dene Lodge, another seat of the present duke.

It is needless to say that Mr. Potter conceived at once a humorous opposition to the artistic enthusiasm of the critic, and, plunging into the garden, took a mischievous delight in its wildness and the victorious struggle of nature with the formality of art. At every step through the tangled labyrinth he could see where precision and order had been invaded, and even the rigid masonry broken or upheaved by the rebellious force. Yet here and there the two powers had combined to offer an example of beauty neither could have effected alone. A passion vine had overrun and enclasped a vase with a perfect symmetry no sculptor could have achieved. A heavy balustrade was made ethereal with a delicate fretwork of vegetation between its balusters like lace. Here, however, the lap and gurgle of water fell gratefully upon the ear of the perspiring and thirsty Mr. Potter, and turned his attention to more material things. Following

the sound, he presently came upon an enormous oblong marble basin containing three time-worn fountains with grouped figures. The pipes were empty, silent, and choked with reeds and water plants, but the great basin itself was filled with water from some invisible source.

A terraced walk occupied one side of the long parallelogram; at intervals and along the opposite bank, half shadowed by willows, tinted marble figures of tritons, fauns, and dryads arose half hidden in the reeds. They were more or less mutilated by time, and here and there only the empty, moss-covered plinths that had once supported them could be seen. But they were so life-like in their subdued color in the shade that he was for a moment startled.

The water looked deliciously cool. An audacious thought struck him. He was alone, and the place was a secluded one. He knew there were no other visitors; the marble basin was quite hidden from the rest of the garden, and approached only from the path by which he had come, and whose entire view he commanded. He quietly and deliberately undressed himself under the willows, and unhesitatingly plunged into

the basin. The water was four or five feet deep, and its extreme length afforded an excellent swimming bath, despite the water-lilies and a few aquatic plants that mottled its clear surface, or the sedge that clung to the bases of the statues. He disported for some moments in the delicious element, and then seated himself upon one of the half-submerged plinths, almost hidden by reeds, that had once upheld a river god. Here, lazily resting himself upon his elbow, half his body still below the water, his quick ear was suddenly startled by a rustling noise and the sound of footsteps. For a moment he was inclined to doubt his senses; he could see only the empty path before him and the deserted terrace. But the sound became more distinct, and to his great uneasiness appeared to come from the *other* side of the fringe of willows, where there was undoubtedly a path to the fountain which he had overlooked. His clothes were under those willows, but he was at least twenty yards from the bank and an equal distance from the terrace. He was about to slip beneath the water when, to his crowning horror, before he could do so, a young girl slowly appeared from the hidden

willow path full upon the terrace. She was walking leisurely with a parasol over her head and a book in her hand. Even in his intense consternation her whole figure — a charming one in its white dress, sailor hat, and tan shoes — was imprinted on his memory as she instinctively halted to look upon the fountain, evidently an unexpected surprise to her.

A sudden idea flashed upon him. She was at least sixty yards away; he was half hidden in the reeds and well in the long shadows of the willows. If he remained perfectly motionless she might overlook him at that distance, or take him for one of the statues. He remembered also that as he was resting on his elbow, his half-submerged body lying on the plinth below water, he was somewhat in the attitude of one of the river gods. And there was no other escape. If he dived he might not be able to keep under water as long as she remained, and any movement he knew would betray him. He stiffened himself and scarcely breathed. Luckily for him his attitude had been a natural one and easy to keep. It was well, too, for she was evidently in no hurry and walked slowly,

stopping from time to time to admire the basin and its figures. Suddenly he was instinctively aware that she was looking towards him and even changing her position, moving her pretty head and shading her eyes with her hand as if for a better view. He remained motionless, scarcely daring to breathe. Yet there was something so innocently frank and undisturbed in her observation, that he knew as instinctively that she suspected nothing, and took him for a half-submerged statue. He breathed more freely. But presently she stopped, glanced around her, and, keeping her eyes fixed in his direction, began to walk backwards slowly until she reached a stone balustrade behind her. On this she leaped, and, sitting down, opened in her lap the sketch-book she was carrying, and, taking out a pencil, to his horror began to sketch!

For a wild moment he recurred to his first idea of diving and swimming at all hazards to the bank, but the conviction that now his slightest movement must be detected held him motionless. He must save her the mortification of knowing she was sketching a living man, if he died for it. She sketched rapidly but fixedly and ab-

sorbedly, evidently forgetting all else in her work. From time to time she held out her sketch before her to compare it with her subject. Yet the seconds seemed minutes and the minutes hours. Suddenly, to his great relief, a distant voice was heard calling "Lottie." It was a woman's voice; by its accent it also seemed to him an American one.

The young girl made a slight movement of impatience, but did not look up, and her pencil moved still more rapidly. Again the voice called, this time nearer. The young girl's pencil fairly flew over the paper, as, still without looking up, she lifted a pretty voice and answered back, "Y-e-e-s!"

It struck him that her accent was also that of a compatriot.

"Where on earth are you?" continued the first voice, which now appeared to come from the other side of the willows on the path by which the young girl had approached. "Here, aunty," replied the girl, closing her sketch-book with a snap and starting to her feet.

A stout woman, fashionably dressed, made her appearance from the willow path.

"What have you been doing all this while?" she said querulously. "Not sketching, I hope," she added, with a suspicious glance at the book. "You know your professor expressly forbade you to do so in your holidays."

The young girl shrugged her shoulders. "I've been looking at the fountains," she replied evasively.

"And horrid looking pagan things they are, too," said the elder woman, turning from them disgustedly, without vouchsafing a second glance. "Come. If we expect to do the abbey, we must hurry up, or we won't catch the train. Your uncle is waiting for us at the top of the garden."

And, to Potter's intense relief, she grasped the young girl's arm and hurried her away, their figures the next moment vanishing in the tangled shrubbery.

Potter lost no time in plunging with his cramped limbs into the water and regaining the other side. Here he quickly half dried himself with some sun-warmed leaves and baked mosses, hurried on his clothes, and hastened off in the opposite direction to the path taken by them, yet with such circuitous skill and speed that he reached the

great gateway without encountering anybody. A brisk walk brought him to the station in time to catch a stopping train, and in half an hour he was speeding miles away from Domesday Park and his half-forgotten episode.

Meantime the two ladies continued on their way to the abbey. "I don't see why I may n't sketch things I see about me," said the young lady impatiently. "Of course, I understand that I must go through the rudimentary drudgery of my art and study from casts, and learn perspective, and all that; but I can't see what's the difference between working in a stuffy studio over a hand or arm that I know is only a *study*, and sketching a full or half length in the open air with the wonderful illusion of light and shade and distance — and grouping and combining them all — that one knows and feels makes a picture. The real picture one makes is already in one's self."

"For goodness' sake, Lottie, don't go on again with your usual absurdities. Since you are bent on being an artist, and your Popper has consented and put you under

the most expensive master in Paris, the least you can do is to follow the rules. And I dare say he only wanted you to 'sink the shop' in company. It's such horrid bad form for you artistic people to be always dragging out your sketch-books. What would you say if your Popper came over here, and began to examine every lady's dress in society to see what material it was, just because he was a big dry-goods dealer in America?"

The young girl, accustomed to her aunt's extravagances, made no reply. But that night she consulted her sketch, and was so far convinced of her own instincts, and the profound impression the fountain had made upon her, that she was enabled to secretly finish her interrupted sketch from memory. For Miss Charlotte Forrest was a born artist, and in no mere caprice had persuaded her father to let her adopt the profession, and accepted the drudgery of a novitiate. She looked earnestly upon this first real work of her hand and found it good! Still, it was but a pencil sketch, and wanted the vivification of color.

When she returned to Paris she began — still secretly — a larger study in oils. She

worked upon it in her own room every moment she could spare from her studio practice, unknown to her professor. It absorbed her existence; she grew thin and pale. When it was finished, and only then, she showed it tremblingly to her master. He stood silent, in profound astonishment. The easel before him showed a foreground of tangled luxuriance, from which stretched a sheet of water like a darkened mirror, while through parted reeds on its glossy surface arose the half-submerged figure of a river god, exquisite in contour, yet whose delicate outlines were almost a vision by the crowning illusion of light, shadow, and atmosphere.

“It is a beautiful copy, mademoiselle, and I forgive you breaking my rules,” he said, drawing a long breath. “But I cannot now recall the original picture.”

“It’s no copy of a picture, professor,” said the young girl timidly, and she disclosed her secret. “It was the only perfect statue there,” she added diffidently; “but I think it wanted — something.”

“True,” said the professor abstractedly. “Where the elbow rests there should be a half-inverted urn flowing with water; but

the drawing of that shoulder is so perfect — as is *your* study of it — that one guesses the missing forearm one cannot see, which clasped it. Beautiful! beautiful!”

Suddenly he stopped, and turned his eyes almost searchingly on hers.

“You say you have never drawn from the human model, mademoiselle?”

“Never,” said the young girl innocently.

“True,” murmured the professor again.

“These are the classic ideal measurements. There are no limbs like those now. Yet it is wonderful! And this gem, you say, is in England?”

“Yes.”

“Good! I am going there in a few days. I shall make a pilgrimage to see it. Until then, mademoiselle, I beg you to break as many of my rules as you like.”

Three weeks later she found the professor one morning standing before her picture in her private studio. “You have returned from England,” she said joyfully.

“I have,” said the professor gravely.

“You have seen the original subject?” she said timidly.

“I have *not*. I have not seen it, mademoiselle,” he said, gazing at her mildly

through his glasses, "because it does not exist, and never existed."

The young girl turned pale.

"Listen. I have go to England. I arrive at the Park of Domesday. I penetrate the beautiful, wild garden. I approach the fountain. I see the wonderful water, the exquisite light and shade, the lilies, the mysterious reeds — beautiful, yet not as beautiful as you have made it, mademoiselle, but no statue — no river god! I demand it of the *concierge*. He knows of it absolutely nothing. I transport myself to the noble proprietor, Monsieur le Duc, at a distant château where he has collected the ruined marbles. It is not there."

"Yet I saw it," said the young girl earnestly, yet with a troubled face. "O professor," she burst out appealingly, "what do you think it was?"

"I think, mademoiselle," said the professor gravely, "that you created it. Believe me, it is a function of genius! More, it is a proof, a necessity! You saw the beautiful lake, the ruined fountain, the soft shadows, the empty plinth, curtained by reeds. You yourself say you feel there was 'something wanting.' Unconsciously you

yourself supplied it. All that you had ever dreamt of mythology, all that you had ever seen of statuary, thronged upon you at that supreme moment, and, evolved from your own fancy, the river god was born. It is your own, *chère enfant*, as much the offspring of your genius as the exquisite atmosphere you have caught, the charm of light and shadow that you have brought away. Accept my felicitations. You have little more to learn of me."

As he bowed himself out and descended the stairs he shrugged his shoulders slightly. "She is an adorable genius," he murmured. "Yet she is also a woman. Being a woman, naturally she has a lover — this river god! Why not?"

The extraordinary success of Miss Forrest's picture and the instantaneous recognition of her merit as an artist, apart from her novel subject, perhaps went further to remove her uneasiness than any serious conviction of the professor's theory. Nevertheless, it appealed to her poetic and mystic imagination, and although other subjects from her brush met with equally phenomenal success, and she was able in a year to return to America with a reputation assured

beyond criticism, she never entirely forgot the strange incident connected with her initial effort.

And by degrees a singular change came over her. Rich, famous, and attractive, she began to experience a sentimental and romantic interest in that episode. Once, when reproached by her friends for her indifference to her admirers, she had half laughingly replied that she had once found her "ideal," but never would again. Yet the jest had scarcely passed her lips before she became pale and silent. With this change came also a desire to re-purchase the picture, which she had sold in her early success to a speculative American picture-dealer. On inquiry she found, alas! that it had been sold only a day or two before to a Chicago gentleman, of the name of Potter, who had taken a fancy to it.

Miss Forrest curled her pretty lip, but, nothing daunted, resolved to effect her purpose, and sought the purchaser at his hotel. She was ushered into a private drawing-room, where, on a handsome easel, stood the newly acquired purchase. Mr. Potter was out, "but would return in a moment."

Miss Forrest was relieved, for, alone and

undisturbed, she could now let her full soul go out to her romantic creation. As she stood there, she felt the glamour of the old English garden come back to her, the play of light and shadow, the silent pool, the godlike face and bust, with its cast-down, meditative eyes, seen through the parted reeds. She clasped her hands silently before her. Should she never see it again as then?

“Pray don’t let me disturb you; but won’t you take a seat?”

Miss Forrest turned sharply round. Then she started, uttered a frightened little cry, and fainted away.

Mr. Potter was touched, but a master of himself. As she came to, he said quietly: “I came upon you suddenly — as you stood entranced by this picture — just as I did when I first saw it. That’s why I bought it. Are you any relative of the Miss Forrest who painted it?” he continued, quietly looking at her card, which he held in his hand.

Miss Forrest recovered herself sufficiently to reply, and stated her business with some dignity.

“Ah,” said Mr. Potter, “*that* is another

question. You see, the picture has a special value to me, as I once saw an old-fashioned garden like that in England. But that chap there, — I beg your pardon, I mean that figure, — I fancy, is your own creation, entirely. However, I'll think over your proposition, and if you will allow me I'll call and see you about it."

Mr. Potter did call — not once, but many times — and showed quite a remarkable interest in Miss Forrest's art. The question of the sale of the picture, however, remained in abeyance. A few weeks later, after a longer call than usual, Mr. Potter said: —

"Don't you think the best thing we can do is to make a kind of compromise, and let us own the picture together?"

And they did.

A ROMANCE OF THE LINE

As the train moved slowly out of the station, the Writer of Stories looked up wearily from the illustrated pages of the magazines and weeklies on his lap to the illustrated advertisements on the walls of the station sliding past his carriage windows. It was getting to be monotonous. For a while he had been hopefully interested in the bustle of the departing trains, and looked up from his comfortable and early invested position to the later comers with that sense of superiority common to travelers; had watched the conventional leave-takings — always feebly prolonged to the uneasiness of both parties — and contrasted it with the impassive business promptitude of the railway officials; but it was the old experience repeated. Falling back on the illustrated advertisements again, he wondered if their perpetual recurrence at every station would not at last bring to the tired traveler the loathing of satiety; whether the passenger in railway carriages, continually offered

Somebody's oats, inks, washing blue, candles, and soap, apparently as a necessary equipment for a few hours' journey, would not there and thereafter forever ignore the use of these articles, or recoil from that particular quality. Or, as an unbiased observer, he wondered if, on the other hand, impressible passengers, after passing three or four stations, had ever leaped from the train and refused to proceed further until they were supplied with one or more of those articles. Had he ever known any one who confided to him in a moment of expansiveness that he had dated his use of Somebody's soap to an advertisement persistently borne upon him through the medium of a railway carriage window? No! Would he not have connected that man with that other certifying individual who always appends a name and address singularly obscure and unconvincing, yet who, at some supreme moment, recommends Somebody's pills to a dying friend, — afflicted with a similar address, — which restore him to life and undying obscurity. Yet these pictorial and literary appeals must have a potency independent of the wares they advertise, or they would n't be there.

Perhaps he was the more sensitive to this monotony as he was just then seeking change and novelty in order to write a new story. He was not looking for material, — his subjects were usually the same, — he was merely hoping for that relaxation and diversion which should freshen and fit him for later concentration. Still, he had often heard of the odd circumstances to which his craft were sometimes indebted for suggestion. The invasion of an eccentric-looking individual — probably an innocent tradesman — into a railway carriage had given the hint for “A Night with a Lunatic;” a nervously excited and belated passenger had once unconsciously sat for an escaped forger; the picking up of a forgotten novel in the rack, with passages marked in pencil, had afforded the plot of a love story; or the germ of a romance had been found in an obscure news paragraph which, under less listless moments, would have passed unread. On the other hand, he recalled these inconvenient and inconsistent moments from which the so-called “inspiration” sprang, the utter incongruity of time and place in some brilliant conception, and wondered if sheer vacuity of mind were really so favorable.

Going back to his magazine again, he began to get mildly interested in a story. Turning the page, however, he was confronted by a pictorial advertising leaflet inserted between the pages, yet so artistic in character that it might have been easily mistaken for an illustration of the story he was reading, and perhaps was not more remote or obscure in reference than many he had known. But the next moment he recognized with despair that it was only a smaller copy of one he had seen on the hoarding at the last station. He threw the leaflet aside, but the flavor of the story was gone. The peerless detergent of the advertisement had erased it from the tablets of his memory. He leaned back in his seat again, and lazily watched the flying suburbs. Here were the usual promising open spaces and patches of green, quickly succeeded again by solid blocks of houses whose rear windows gave directly upon the line, yet seldom showed an inquisitive face—even of a wondering child. It was a strange revelation of the depressing effects of familiarity. Expresses might thunder by, goods trains drag their slow length along, shunting trains pipe all day beneath

their windows, but the tenants heeded them not. Here, too, was the junction, with its labyrinthine interlacing of tracks that dazed the tired brain; the overburdened telegraph posts, that looked as if they really could not stand another wire; the long lines of empty, homeless, and deserted trains in sidings that had seen better days; the idle trains, with staring vacant windows, which were eventually seized by a pert engine hissing, "Come along, will you?" and departed with a discontented grunt from every individual carriage coupling; the racing trains, that suddenly appeared parallel with one's carriage windows, begot false hopes of a challenge of speed, and then, without warning, drew contemptuously and superciliously away; the swift eclipse of everything in a tunneled bridge; the long, slithering passage of an "up" express, and then the flash of a station, incoherent and unintelligible with pictorial advertisements again.

He closed his eyes to concentrate his thought, and by degrees a pleasant languor stole over him. The train had by this time attained that rate of speed which gave it a slight swing and roll on curves and

switches not unlike the rocking of a cradle. Once or twice he opened his eyes sleepily upon the waltzing trees in the double planes of distance, and again closed them. Then, in one of these slight oscillations, he felt himself ridiculously slipping into slumber, and awoke with some indignation. Another station was passed, in which process the pictorial advertisements on the hoardings and the pictures in his lap seemed to have become jumbled up, confused, and to dance before him, and then suddenly and strangely, without warning, the train stopped short — at *another* station. And then he arose, and — what five minutes before he never conceived of doing — gathered his papers and slipped from the carriage to the platform. When I say “he” I mean, of course, the Writer of Stories; yet the man who slipped out was half his age and a different-looking person.

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The change from the motion of the train — for it seemed that he had been traveling several hours — to the firmer platform for a moment bewildered him. The station looked strange, and he fancied it lacked a certain kind of distinctness. But that qual-

ity was also noticeable in the porters and loungers on the platform. He thought it singular, until it seemed to him that they were not characteristic, nor in any way important or necessary to the business he had in hand. Then, with an effort, he tried to remember himself and his purpose, and made his way through the station to the open road beyond. A van, bearing the inscription, "Removals to Town and Country," stood before him and blocked his way, but a dogcart was in waiting, and a grizzled groom, who held the reins, touched his hat respectfully. Although still dazed by his journey and uncertain of himself, he seemed to recognize in the man that distinctive character which was wanting in the others. The correctness of his surmise was revealed a few moments later, when, after he had taken his seat beside him, and they were rattling out of the village street, the man turned towards him and said:—

"Tha 'll know Sir Jarge?"

"I do not," said the young man.

"Ay! but theer 's many as cooms here as doan't, for all they cooms. Tha 'll say it ill becooms mea as war man and boy in Sir Jarge's sarvice for fifty year, to say owt

agen him, but I'm here to do it, or they could n't foolfil their business. Tha wast to ax me questions about Sir Jarge and the Grange, and I wor to answer soa as to make tha think thar was suthing wrong wi' un. Howbut I may save tha time and tell thea downroight that Sir Jarge forged his uncle's will, and so gotten the Grange. That 'ee keeps his niece in mortal fear o' he. That tha 'll be put in haunted chamber wi' a boggle."

"I think," said the young man hesitatingly, "that there must be some mistake. I do not know any Sir George, and I am *not* going to the Grange."

"Eay! Then thee are n't the 'ero sent down from London by the story writer?"

"Not by *that* one," said the young man diffidently.

The old man's face changed. It was no mere figure of speech: it actually was *another* face that looked down upon the traveler.

"Then mayhap your honor will be bespoken at the Angel's Inn," he said, with an entirely distinct and older dialect, "and a finer hostel for a young gentleman of your condition ye 'll not find on this side of

Oxford. A fair chamber, looking to the sun; sheets smelling of lavender from Dame Margery's own store, and, for the matter of that, spread by the fair hands of Maudlin, her daughter—the best favored lass that ever danced under a Maypole. Ha! have at ye there, young sir! Not to speak of the October ale of old Gregory, her father—ay, nor the rare Hollands, that never paid excise duties to the king.”

“I'm afraid,” said the young traveler timidly, “there's over a century between us. There's really some mistake.”

“What?” said the groom, “ye are *not* the young spark who is to marry Mistress Amy at the Hall, yet makes a pother and mess of it all by a duel with Sir Roger de Cadgerly, the wicked baronet, for his over-free discourse with our fair Maudlin this very eve? Ye are *not* the traveler whose post-chaise is now at the Falcon? Ye are not he that was bespoken by the story writer in London?”

“I don't think I am,” said the young man apologetically. “Indeed, as I am feeling far from well, I think I'll get out and walk.”

He got down—the vehicle and driver

vanished in the distance. It did not surprise him. "I must collect my thoughts," he said. He did so. Possibly the collection was not large, for presently he said, with a sigh of relief:—

"I see it all now! My name is Paul Bunker. I am of the young branch of an old Quaker family, rich and respected in the country, and I am on a visit to my ancestral home. But I have lived since a child in America, and am alien to the traditions and customs of the old country, and even of the seat to which my fathers belong. I have brought with me from the far West many peculiarities of speech and thought that may startle my kinsfolk. But I certainly shall not address my uncle as 'Hoss!' nor shall I say 'guess' oftener than is necessary."

Much brightened and refreshed by his settled identity, he had time, as he walked briskly along, to notice the scenery, which was certainly varied and conflicting in character, and quite inconsistent with his preconceived notions of an English landscape. On his right, a lake of the brightest cobalt blue stretched before a many-towered and terraced town, which was relieved by a

background of luxuriant foliage and emerald-green mountains; on his left arose a rugged mountain, which he was surprised to see was snow-capped, albeit a tunnel was observable midway of its height, and a train just issuing from it. Almost regretting that he had not continued on his journey, as he was fully sensible that it was in some way connected with the railway he had quitted, presently his attention was directed to the gateway of a handsome park, whose mansion was faintly seen in the distance. Hurrying towards him, down the avenue of limes, was a strange figure. It was that of a man of middle age, clad in Quaker garb, yet with an extravagance of cut and detail which seemed antiquated even for England. He had evidently seen the young man approaching, and his face was beaming with welcome. If Paul had doubted that it was his uncle, the first words he spoke would have reassured him.

“Welcome to Hawthorn Hall,” said the figure, grasping his hand heartily, “but thee will excuse me if I do not tarry with thee long at present, for I am hastening, even now, with some nourishing and sustaining food for Giles Hayward, a farm

laborer." He pointed to a package he was carrying. "But thee will find thy cousins Jane and Dorcas Bunker taking tea in the summer-house. Go to them! Nay — positively — I may not linger, but will return to thee quickly." And, to Paul's astonishment, he trotted away on his sturdy, respectable legs, still beaming and carrying his package in his hand.

"Well, I'll be dog-goned! but the old man ain't going to be left, you bet!" he ejaculated, suddenly remembering his dialect. "He'll get there, whether school keeps or not!" Then, reflecting that no one heard him, he added simply, "He certainly was not over civil towards the nephew he has never seen before. And those girls — whom I don't know! How very awkward!"

Nevertheless, he continued his way up the avenue towards the mansion. The park was beautifully kept. Remembering the native wildness and virgin seclusion of the Western forest, he could not help contrasting it with the conservative gardening of this pretty woodland, every rood of which had been patrolled by keepers and rangers, and preserved and fostered hundreds of

years before he was born, until warmed for human occupancy. At times the avenue was crossed by grass drives, where the original woodland had been displaced, not by the exigency of a "clearing" for tillage, as in his own West, but for the leisurely pleasure of the owner. Then, a few hundred yards from the house itself, — a quaint Jacobean mansion, — he came to an open space where the sylvan landscape had yielded to floral cultivation, and so fell upon a charming summer-house, or arbor, embowered with roses. It must have been the one of which his uncle had spoken, for there, to his wondering admiration, sat two little maids before a rustic table, drinking tea demurely, yes, with all the evident delight of a childish escapade from their elders. While in the picturesque quaintness of their attire there was still a formal suggestion of the sect to which their father belonged, their summer frocks — differing in color, yet each of the same subdued tint — were alike in cut and fashion, and short enough to show their dainty feet in prim slippers and silken hose that matched their frocks. As the afternoon sun glanced through the leaves upon their pink cheeks, tied up in

quaint hats by ribbons under their chins, they made a charming picture. At least Paul thought so as he advanced towards them, hat in hand. They looked up at his approach, but again cast down their eyes with demure shyness; yet he fancied that they first exchanged glances with each other, full of mischievous intelligence.

"I am your cousin Paul," he said smilingly, "though I am afraid I am introducing myself almost as briefly as your father just now excused himself to me. He told me I would find you here, but he himself was hastening on a Samaritan mission."

"With a box in his hand?" said the girls simultaneously, exchanging glances with each other again.

"With a box containing some restorative, I think," responded Paul, a little wonderingly.

"Restorative! So *that*'s what he calls it now, is it?" said one of the girls saucily. "Well, no one knows what's in the box, though he always carries it with him. Thee never sees him without it" —

"And a roll of paper," suggested the other girl.

"Yes, a roll of paper — but one never

knows what it is!" said the first speaker. "It's very strange. But no matter now, Paul. Welcome to Hawthorn Hall. I am Jane Bunker, and this is Dorcas." She stopped, and then, looking down demurely, added, "Thee may kiss us both, cousin Paul."

The young man did not wait for a second invitation, but gently touched his lips to their soft young cheeks.

"Thee does not speak like an American, Paul. Is thee really and truly one?" continued Jane.

Paul remembered that he had forgotten his dialect, but it was too late now.

"I am really and truly one, and your own cousin, and I hope you will find me a very dear" —

"Oh!" said Dorcas, starting up primly. "You must really allow me to withdraw." To the young man's astonishment, she seized her parasol, and, with a youthful affectation of dignity, glided from the summer-house and was lost among the trees.

"Thy declaration to me was rather sudden," said Jane quietly, in answer to his look of surprise, "and Dorcas is peculiarly sensitive and less like the 'world's people'

than I am. And it was just a little cruel, considering that she has loved thee secretly all these years, followed thy fortunes in America with breathless eagerness, thrilled at thy narrow escapes, and wept at thy privations."

"But she has never seen me before!" said the astounded Paul.

"And thee had never seen me before, and yet thee has dared to propose to me five minutes after thee arrived, and in her presence."

"But, my dear girl!" expostulated Paul.

"Stand off!" she said, rapidly opening her parasol and interposing it between them. "Another step nearer — ay, even another word of endearment — and I shall be compelled — nay, forced," she added in a lower voice, "to remove this parasol, lest it should be crushed and ruined!"

"I see," he said gloomily, "you have been reading novels; but so have I, and the same ones! Nevertheless, I intended only to tell you that I hoped you would always find me a kind friend."

She shut her parasol up with a snap. "And I only intended to tell thee that my heart was given to another."

"You *intended* — and now?"

"Is it the 'kind friend' who asks?"

"If it were not?"

"Really?"

"Yes."

"Ah!"

"Oh!"

"But thee loves another?" she said, toying with her cup.

He attempted to toy with his, but broke it. A man lacks delicacy in this kind of persiflage. "You mean I am loved by another," he said bluntly.

"You dare to say that!" she said, flashing, in spite of her prim demeanor.

"No, but *you* did just now! You said your sister loved me!"

"Did I?" she said dreamily. "Dear! dear! That's the trouble of trying to talk like Mr. Blank's delightful dialogues. One gets so mixed!"

"Yet you will be a sister to me?" he said. "'Tis an old American joke, but 't will serve."

There was a long silence.

"Had thee not better go to sister Dorcas? She is playing with the cows," said Jane plaintively.

"You forget," he returned gravely, "that, on page 27 of the novel we have both read, at this point he is supposed to kiss her."

She had forgotten, but they both remembered in time. At this moment a scream came faintly from the distance. They both started, and rose.

"It is sister Dorcas," said Jane, sitting down again and pouring out another cup of tea. "I have always told her that one of those Swiss cows would hook her."

Paul stared at her with a strange revulsion of feeling. "I could save Dorcas," he muttered to himself, "in less time than it takes to describe." He paused, however, as he reflected that this would depend entirely upon the methods of the writer of this description. "I could rescue her! I have only to take the first clothes-line that I find, and with that knowledge and skill with the lasso which I learned in the wilds of America, I could stop the charge of the most furious ruminant. I will!" and without another word he turned and rushed off in the direction of the sound.

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He had not gone a hundred yards before he paused, a little bewildered. To the left

could still be seen the cobalt lake with the terraced background; to the right the rugged mountains. He chose the latter. Luckily for him a cottager's garden lay in his path, and from a line supported by a single pole depended the homely linen of the cottager. To tear these garments from the line was the work of a moment (although it represented the whole week's washing), and hastily coiling the rope dexterously in his hand, he sped onward. Already panting with exertion and excitement, a few roods farther he was confronted with a spectacle that left him breathless.

A woman — young, robust, yet gracefully formed — was running ahead of him, driving before her with an open parasol an animal which he instantly recognized as one of that simple yet treacherous species most feared by the sex — known as the "Moo Cow."

For a moment he was appalled by the spectacle. But it was only for a moment! Recalling his manhood and her weakness, he stopped, and bracing his foot against a stone, with a graceful flourish of his lasso around his head, threw it in the air. It uncoiled slowly, sped forward with unerr-

ing precision, and missed! With the single cry of "Saved!" the fair stranger sank fainting in his arms! He held her closely until the color came back to her pale face. Then he quietly disentangled the lasso from his legs.

"Where am I?" she said faintly.

"In the same place," he replied, slowly but firmly. "But," he added, "you have changed!"

She had, indeed, even to her dress. It was now of a vivid brick red, and so much longer in the skirt that it seemed to make her taller. Only her hat remained the same.

"Yes," she said, in a low, reflective voice and a disregard of her previous dialect, as she gazed up in his eyes with an eloquent lucidity, "I have changed, Paul! I feel myself changing at those words you uttered to Jane. There are moments in a woman's life that man knows nothing of; moments bitter and cruel, sweet and merciful, that change her whole being; moments in which the simple girl becomes a worldly woman; moments in which the slow procession of her years is never noted—except by another woman! Moments that change her

outlook on the world and her relations to it — and her husband's relations! Moments when the maid becomes a wife, the wife a widow, the widow a re-married woman, by a simple, swift illumination of the fancy. Moments when, wrought upon by a single word — a look — an emphasis and rising inflection, all logical sequence is cast away, processes are lost — inductions lead nowhere. Moments when the inharmonious becomes harmonious, the indiscreet discreet, the inefficient efficient, and the inevitable evitable. I mean," she corrected herself hurriedly — "You know what I mean! If you have not felt it you have read it!"

"I have," he said thoughtfully. "We have both read it in the same novel. She is a fine writer."

"Ye-e-s." She hesitated with that slight resentment of praise of another woman so delightful in her sex. "But you have forgotten the Moo Cow!" and she pointed to where the distracted animal was careering across the lawn towards the garden.

"You are right," he said, "the incident is not yet closed. Let us pursue it."

They both pursued it. Discarding the useless lasso, he had recourse to a few

well-aimed epithets. The infuriated animal swerved and made directly towards a small fountain in the centre of the garden. In attempting to clear it, it fell directly into the deep cup-like basin and remained helplessly fixed, with its fore-legs projecting uneasily beyond the rim.

“Let us leave it there,” she said, “and forget it—and all that has gone before. Believe me,” she added, with a faint sigh, “it is best. Our paths diverge from this moment. I go to the summer-house, and you go to the Hall, where my father is expecting you.” He would have detained her a moment longer, but she glided away and was gone.

Left to himself again, that slight sense of bewilderment which had clouded his mind for the last hour began to clear away; his singular encounter with the girls strangely enough affected him less strongly than his brief and unsatisfactory interview with his uncle. For, after all, *he* was his host, and upon him depended his stay at Hawthorn Hall. The mysterious and slighting allusions of his cousins to the old man’s eccentricities also piqued his curiosity. Why had they sneered at his description of the

contents of the package he carried — and what did it really contain? He did not reflect that it was none of his business, — people in his situation seldom do, — and he eagerly hurried towards the Hall. But he found in his preoccupation he had taken the wrong turning in the path, and that he was now close to the wall which bounded and overlooked the highway. Here a singular spectacle presented itself. A cyclist covered with dust was seated in the middle of the road, trying to restore circulation to his bruised and injured leg by chafing it with his hands, while beside him lay his damaged bicycle. He had evidently met with an accident. In an instant Paul had climbed the wall and was at his side.

“Can I offer you any assistance?” he asked eagerly.

“Thanks — no! I’ve come a beastly cropper over something or other on this road, and I’m only bruised, though the machine has suffered worse,” replied the stranger, in a fresh, cheery voice. He was a good-looking fellow of about Paul’s own age, and the young American’s heart went out towards him.

“How did it happen?” asked Paul.

“That’s what puzzles me,” said the stranger. “I was getting out of the way of a queer old chap in the road, and I ran over something that seemed only an old scroll of paper; but the shock was so great that I was thrown, and I fancy I was for a few moments unconscious. Yet I cannot see any other obstruction in the road, and there’s only that bit of paper.” He pointed to the paper, — a half-crushed roll of ordinary foolscap, showing the mark of the bicycle upon it.

A strange idea came into Paul’s mind. He picked up the paper and examined it closely. Besides the mark already indicated, it showed two sharp creases about nine inches long, and another exactly at the point of the impact of the bicycle. Taking a folded two-foot rule from his pocket, he carefully measured these parallel creases and made an exhaustive geometrical calculation with his pencil on the paper. The stranger watched him with awed and admiring interest. Rising, he again carefully examined the road, and was finally rewarded by the discovery of a sharp indentation in the dust, which, on measurement and comparison with the creases in the

paper and the calculations he had just made, proved to be identical.

"There was a solid body in that paper," said Paul quietly; "a parallelogram exactly nine inches long and three wide."

"I say! you're wonderfully clever, don't you know," said the stranger, with unaffected wonder. "I see it all — a brick."

Paul smiled gently and shook his head. "That is the hasty inference of an inexperienced observer. You will observe at the point of impact of your wheel the parallel crease is *curved*, as from the yielding of the resisting substances, and not *broken*, as it would be by the crumbling of a brick."

"I say, you're awfully detective, don't you know! just like that fellow — what's his name?" said the stranger admiringly.

The words recalled Paul to himself. Why was he acting like a detective? and what was he seeking to discover? Nevertheless, he felt impelled to continue. "And that queer old chap whom you met — why did n't he help you?"

"Because I passed him before I ran into the — the parallelogram, and I suppose he did n't know what happened behind him?"

"Did he have anything in his hand?"

"Can't say."

"And you say you were unconscious afterwards?"

"Yes!"

"Long enough for the culprit to remove the principal evidence of his crime?"

"Come! I say, really you are — you know you are!"

"Have you any secret enemy?"

"No."

"And you don't know Mr. Bunker, the man who owns this vast estate?"

"Not at all. I'm from Upper Tooting."

"Good afternoon," said Paul abruptly, and turned away.

It struck him afterwards that his action might have seemed uncivil, and even inhuman, to the bruised cyclist, who could hardly walk. But it was getting late, and he was still far from the Hall, which, oddly enough, seemed to be no longer visible from the road. He wandered on for some time, half convinced that he had passed the lodge gates, yet hoping to find some other entrance to the domain. Dusk was falling; the rounded outlines of the park trees beyond the wall were solid masses of shadow. The full moon, presently rising, restored

them again to symmetry, and at last he, to his relief, came upon the massive gateway. Two lions ramped in stone on the side pillars. He thought it strange that he had not noticed the gateway on his previous entrance, but he remembered that he was fully preoccupied with the advancing figure of his uncle. In a few minutes the Hall itself appeared, and here again he was surprised that he had overlooked before its noble proportions and picturesque outline. Its broad terraces, dazzlingly white in the moonlight; its long line of mullioned windows, suffused with a warm red glow from within, made it look like part of a wintry landscape — and suggested a Christmas card. The venerable ivy that hid the ravages time had made in its walls looked like black carving. His heart swelled with strange emotions as he gazed at his ancestral hall. How many of his blood had lived and died there; how many had gone forth from that great porch to distant lands! He tried to think of his father — a little child — peeping between the balustrades of that terrace. He tried to think of it, and perhaps would have succeeded had it not occurred to him that it was a known fact that his uncle had bought

the estate and house of an impoverished nobleman only the year before. Yet — he could not tell why — he seemed to feel higher and nobler for that trial.

The terrace was deserted, and so quiet that as he ascended to it his footsteps seemed to echo from the walls. When he reached the portals, the great oaken door swung noiselessly on its hinges — opened by some unseen but waiting servitor — and admitted him to a lofty hall, dark with hangings and family portraits, but warmed by a red carpet the whole length of its stone floor. For a moment he waited for the servant to show him to the drawing-room or his uncle's study. But no one appeared. Believing this to be a part of the characteristic simplicity of the Quaker household, he boldly entered the first door, and found himself in a brilliantly lit and perfectly empty drawing-room. The same experience met him with the other rooms on that floor — the dining-room displaying an already set, exquisitely furnished and decorated table, with chairs for twenty guests! He mechanically ascended the wide oaken staircase that led to the corridor of bedrooms above a central salon. Here he

found only the same solitude. Bedroom doors yielded to his touch, only to show the same brilliantly lit vacancy. He presently came upon one room which seemed to give unmistakable signs of *his own* occupancy. Surely there stood his own dressing-case on the table! and his own evening clothes carefully laid out on another, as if fresh from a valet's hands. He stepped hastily into the corridor — there was no one there; he rang the bell — there was no response! But he noticed that there was a jug of hot water in his basin, and he began dressing mechanically.

There was little doubt that he was in a haunted house, but this did not particularly disturb him. Indeed, he found himself wondering if it could be logically called a haunted house — unless he himself was haunting it, for there seemed to be no other there. Perhaps the apparitions would come later, when he was dressed. Clearly it was not his uncle's house — and yet, as he had never been inside his uncle's house, he reflected that he ought not to be positive.

He finished dressing and sat down in an armchair with a kind of thoughtful expectancy. But presently his curiosity became

impatient of the silence and mystery, and he ventured once more to explore the house. Opening his bedroom door, he found himself again upon the deserted corridor, but this time he could distinctly hear a buzz of voices from the drawing-room below. Assured that he was near a solution of the mystery, he rapidly descended the broad staircase and made his way to the open door of the drawing-room. But although the sound of voices increased as he advanced, when he entered the room, to his utter astonishment, it was as empty as before.

Yet, in spite of his bewilderment and confusion, he was able to follow one of the voices, which, in its peculiar distinctness and half-perfunctory tone, he concluded must belong to the host of the invisible assembly.

“Ah,” said the voice, greeting some unseen visitor, “so glad you have come. Afraid your engagements just now would keep you away.” Then the voice dropped to a lower and more confidential tone. “You must take down Lady Dartman, but you will have Miss Morecamp—a clever girl—on the other side of you. Ah, Sir

George! So good of you to come. All well at the Priory? So glad to hear it." (Lower and more confidentially.) "You know Mrs. Monkston. You'll sit by her. A little cut up by her husband losing his seat. Try to amuse her."

Emboldened by desperation, Paul turned in the direction of the voice. "I am Paul Bunker," he said hesitatingly. "I'm afraid you'll think me intrusive, but I was looking for my uncle, and"—

"Intrusive, my dear boy! The son of my near neighbor in the country intrusive? Really, now, I like that! Grace!" (the voice turned in another direction) "here is the American nephew of our neighbor Bunker at Widdlestone, who thinks he is 'a stranger.'"

"We all knew of your expected arrival at Widdlestone—it was so good of you to waive ceremony and join us," said a well-bred feminine voice, which Paul at once assumed to belong to the hostess. "But I must find some one for your dinner partner. Mary" (here her voice was likewise turned away), "this is Mr. Bunker, the nephew of an old friend and neighbor in Upshire;" (the voice again turned to him), "you will

take Miss Morecamp in. My dear" (once again averted), "I must find some one else to console poor dear Lord Billingtrees with." Here the hostess's voice was drowned by fresh arrivals.

Bewildered and confused as he was, standing in this empty desert of a drawing-room, yet encompassed on every side by human voices, so marvelous was the power of suggestion, he seemed to almost feel the impact of the invisible crowd. He was trying desperately to realize his situation when a singularly fascinating voice at his elbow unexpectedly assisted him. It was evidently his dinner partner.

"I suppose you must be tired after your journey. When did you arrive?"

"Only a few hours ago," said Paul.

"And I dare say you have n't slept since you arrived. One does n't on the passage, you know; the twenty hours pass so quickly, and the experience is so exciting — to *us* at least. But I suppose as an American you are used to it."

Paul gasped. He had passively accepted the bodiless conversation, because it was at least intelligible! But *now!* Was he going mad?

She evidently noticed his silence. "Never mind," she continued, "you can tell me all about it at dinner. Do you know I always think that this sort of thing — what we're doing now, — this ridiculous formality of reception, — which I suppose is after all only a concession to our English force of habit, — is absurd! We ought to pass, as it were, directly from our houses to the dinner-table. It saves time."

"Yes — no — that is — I'm afraid I don't follow you," stammered Paul.

There was a slight pout in her voice as she replied: "No matter now — we must follow them — for our host is moving off with Lady Billingtrees, and it's our turn now."

So great was the illusion that he found himself mechanically offering his arm as he moved through the empty room towards the door. Then he descended the staircase without another word, preceded, however, by the sound of his host's voice. Following this as a blind man might, he entered the dining-room, which to his discomfiture was as empty as the salon above. Still following the host's voice, he dropped into a chair before the empty table, wondering what

variation of the Barmecide feast was in store for him. Yet the hum of voices from the vacant chairs around the board so strongly impressed him that he could almost believe that he was actually at dinner.

"Are you seated?" asked the charming voice at his side.

"Yes," a little wonderingly, as his was the only seat visibly occupied.

"I am so glad that this silly ceremony is over. By the way, where are you?"

Paul would have liked to answer, "Lord only knows!" but he reflected that it might not sound polite. "Where am I?" he feebly repeated.

"Yes; where are you dining?"

It seemed a cool question under the circumstances, but he answered promptly, —

"With you."

"Of course," said the charming voice; "but where are you eating your dinner?"

Considering that he was not eating anything, Paul thought this cooler still. But he answered briefly, "In Upshire."

"Oh! At your uncle's?"

"No," said Paul bluntly; "in the next house."

"Why, that's Sir William's — our host's

—and he and his family are here in London. You are joking.”

“Listen!” said Paul desperately. Then in a voice unconsciously lowered he hurriedly told her where he was — how he came there — the empty house — the viewless company! To his surprise the only response was a musical little laugh. But the next moment her voice rose higher with an unmistakable concern in it, apparently addressing their invisible host.

“Oh, Sir William, only think how dreadful. Here’s poor Mr. Bunker, alone in an empty house, which he has mistaken for his uncle’s — and without any dinner!”

“Really; dear, dear! How provoking! But how does he happen to be *with us*? James, how is this?”

“If you please, Sir William,” said a servant’s respectful voice, “Widdlestone is in the circuit and is switched on with the others. We heard that a gentleman’s luggage had arrived at Widdlestone, and we telegraphed for the rooms to be made ready, thinking we’d have her ladyship’s orders later.”

A single gleam of intelligence flashed upon Paul. His luggage — yes, had been

sent from the station to the wrong house, and he had unwittingly followed. But these voices! whence did they come? And where was the actual dinner at which his host was presiding? It clearly was not at this empty table.

“See that he has everything he wants at once,” said Sir William; “there must be some one there.” Then his voice turned in the direction of Paul again, and he said laughingly, “Possess your soul and appetite in patience for a moment, Mr. Bunker; you will be only a course behind us. But we are lucky in having your company—even at your own discomfort.”

Still more bewildered, Paul turned to his invisible partner. “May I ask where *you* are dining?”

“Certainly; at home in Curzon Street,” returned the pretty voice. “It was raining so, I did not go out.”

“And — Lord Billington?” faltered Paul.

“Oh, he’s in Scotland—at his own place.”

“Then, in fact, nobody is dining here at all,” said Paul desperately.

There was a slight pause, and then the

voice responded, with a touch of startled suggestion in it: "Good heavens, Mr. Bunker! Is it possible you don't know we're dining by telephone?"

"By what?"

"Telephone. Yes. We're a telephonic dinner-party. We are dining in our own houses; but, being all friends, we're switched on to each other, and converse exactly as we would at table. It saves a great trouble and expense, for any one of us can give the party, and the poorest can equal the most extravagant. People who are obliged to diet can partake of their own slops at home, and yet mingle with the gourmets without awkwardness or the necessity of apology. We are spared the spectacle, at least, of those who eat and drink too much. We can switch off a bore at once. We can retire when we are fatigued, without leaving a blank space before the others. And all this without saying anything of the higher spiritual and intellectual effect—freed from material grossness of appetite and show—which the dinner party thus attains. But you are surely joking! You, an American, and not know it! Why, it comes from Boston. Have n't you

read that book, 'Jumping a Century'? It's by an American."

A strange illumination came upon Paul. Where had he heard something like this before? But at the same moment his thoughts were diverted by the material entrance of a footman, bearing a silver salver with his dinner. It was part of his singular experience that the visible entrance of this real, commonplace mortal—the only one he had seen—in the midst of this voiceless solitude was distinctly unreal, and had all the effect of an apparition. He distrusted it and the dishes before him. But his lively partner's voice was now addressing an unseen occupant of the next chair. Had she got tired of his ignorance, or was it feminine tact to enable him to eat something? He accepted the latter hypothesis, and tried to eat. But he felt himself following the fascinating voice in all the charm of its youthful and spiritual inflections. Taking advantage of its momentary silence, he said gently, —

"I confess my ignorance, and am willing to admit all you claim for this wonderful invention. But do you think it compensates for the loss of the individual person?"

Take my own case — if you will not think me personal. I have never had the pleasure of seeing you; do you believe that I am content with only that suggestion of your personality which the satisfaction of hearing your voice affords me?"

There was a pause, and then a very mischievous ring in the voice that replied: "It certainly is a personal question, and it is another blessing of this invention that you'll never know whether I am blushing or not; but I forgive you, for *I* never before spoke to any one I had never seen — and I suppose it's confusion. But do you really think you would know me — the *real* one — any better? It is the real person who thinks and speaks, not the outward semblance that we see, which very often unfairly either attracts or repels us? We can always *show* ourselves at our best, but we must, at last, reveal our true colors through our thoughts and speech. Isn't it better to begin with the real thing first?"

"I hope, at least, to have the privilege of judging by myself," said Paul gallantly. "You will not be so cruel as not to let me see you elsewhere, otherwise I shall feel as if I were in some dream, and will certainly

be opposed to your preference for realities."

"I am not certain if the dream would not be more interesting to you," said the voice laughingly. "But I think your hostess is already saying 'good-by.' You know everybody goes at once at this kind of party; the ladies don't retire first, and the gentlemen join them afterwards. In another moment we'll *all* be switched off; but Sir William wants me to tell you that his coachman will drive you to your uncle's, unless you prefer to try and make yourself comfortable for the night here. Good-by!"

The voices around him seemed to grow fainter, and then utterly cease. The lights suddenly leaped up, went out, and left him in complete darkness. He attempted to rise, but in doing so upset the dishes before him, which slid to the floor. A cold air seemed to blow across his feet. The "good-by" was still ringing in his ears as he straightened himself to find he was in his railway carriage, whose door had just been opened for a young lady who was entering the compartment from a wayside station. "Good-by," she repeated to the friend who was seeing her off. The Writer of

Stories hurriedly straightened himself, gathered up the magazines and papers that had fallen from his lap, and glanced at the station walls. The old illustrations glanced back at him! He looked at his watch; he had been asleep just ten minutes!

BOHEMIAN DAYS IN SAN FRANCISCO

IT is but just to the respectable memory of San Francisco that in these vagrant recollections I should deprecate at once any suggestion that the levity of my title described its dominant tone at any period of my early experiences. On the contrary, it was a singular fact that while the rest of California was swayed by an easy, careless unconventionalism, or swept over by waves of emotion and sentiment, San Francisco preserved an intensely material and practical attitude, and even a certain austere morality. I do not, of course, allude to the brief days of '49, when it was a straggling beach of huts and stranded hulks, but to the earlier stages of its development into the metropolis of California. Its first tottering steps in that direction were marked by a distinct gravity and decorum. Even during the period when the revolver settled small private difficulties, and Vigilance Committees adjudicated larger public ones,

an unmistakable seriousness and respectability was the ruling sign of its governing class. It was not improbable that under the reign of the Committee the lawless and vicious class were more appalled by the moral spectacle of several thousand black-coated, serious-minded business men in embattled procession than by mere force of arms, and one "suspect" — a prize-fighter — is known to have committed suicide in his cell after confrontation with his grave and passionless shopkeeping judges. Even that peculiar quality of Californian humor which was apt to mitigate the extravagances of the revolver and the uncertainties of poker had no place in the decorous and responsible utterance of San Francisco. The press was sober, materialistic, practical — when it was not severely admonitory of existing evil; the few smaller papers that indulged in levity were considered libelous and improper. Fancy was displaced by heavy articles on the revenues of the State and inducements to the investment of capital. Local news was under an implied censorship which suppressed anything that might tend to discourage timid or cautious capital. Episodes of romantic lawlessness

or pathetic incidents of mining life were carefully edited — with the comment that these things belonged to the past, and that life and property were now “as safe in San Francisco as in New York or London.”

Wonder-loving visitors in quest of scenes characteristic of the civilization were coldly snubbed with this assurance. Fires, floods, and even seismic convulsions were subjected to a like grimly materialistic optimism. I have a vivid recollection of a ponderous editorial on one of the severer earthquakes, in which it was asserted that only the *unexpectedness* of the onset prevented San Francisco from meeting it in a way that would be deterrent of all future attacks. The unconsciousness of the humor was only equaled by the gravity with which it was received by the whole business community. Strangely enough, this grave materialism flourished side by side with — and was even sustained by — a narrow religious strictness more characteristic of the Pilgrim Fathers of a past century than the Western pioneers of the present. San Francisco was early a city of churches and church organizations to which the leading men and merchants belonged. The lax Sundays of the dying

Spanish race seemed only to provoke a revival of the rigors of the Puritan Sabbath. With the Spaniard and his Sunday afternoon bullfight scarcely an hour distant, the San Francisco pulpit thundered against Sunday picnics. One of the popular preachers, declaiming upon the practice of Sunday dinner-giving, averred that when he saw a guest in his best Sunday clothes standing shamelessly upon the doorstep of his host, he felt like seizing him by the shoulder and dragging him from that threshold of perdition.

Against the actual heathen the feeling was even stronger, and reached its climax one Sunday when a Chinaman was stoned to death by a crowd of children returning from Sunday-school. I am offering these examples with no ethical purpose, but merely to indicate a singular contradictory condition which I do not think writers of early Californian history have fairly recorded. It is not my province to suggest any theory for these appalling exceptions to the usual good-humored lawlessness and extravagance of the rest of the State. They may have been essential agencies to the growth and evolution of the city. They

were undoubtedly sincere. The impressions I propose to give of certain scenes and incidents of my early experience must, therefore, be taken as purely personal and Bohemian, and their selection as equally individual and vagrant. I am writing of what interested me at the time, though not perhaps of what was more generally characteristic of San Francisco.

I had been there a week — an idle week, spent in listless outlook for employment; a full week in my eager absorption of the strange life around me and a photographic sensitiveness to certain scenes and incidents of those days, which start out of my memory to-day as freshly as the day they impressed me.

One of these recollections is of “steamer night,” as it was called, — the night of “steamer day,” — preceding the departure of the mail steamship with the mails for “home.” Indeed, at that time San Francisco may be said to have lived from steamer day to steamer day; bills were made due on that day, interest computed to that period, and accounts settled. The next day was the turning of a new leaf: another essay to fortune, another inspiration of en-

ergy. So recognized was the fact that even ordinary changes of condition, social and domestic, were put aside until *after* steamer day. "I'll see what I can do after next steamer day" was the common cautious or hopeful formula. It was the "Saturday night" of many a wage-earner — and to him a night of festivity. The thoroughfares were animated and crowded; the saloons and theatres full. I can recall myself at such times wandering along the City Front, as the business part of San Francisco was then known. Here the lights were burning all night, the first streaks of dawn finding the merchants still at their counting-house desks. I remember the dim lines of warehouses lining the insecure wharves of rotten piles, half filled in — that had ceased to be wharves, but had not yet become streets, — their treacherous yawning depths, with the uncertain gleam of tarlike mud below, at times still vocal with the lap and gurgle of the tide. I remember the weird stories of disappearing men found afterward imbedded in the ooze in which they had fallen and gasped their life away. I remember the two or three ships, still left standing where they were beached a year

or two before, built in between warehouses, their bows projecting into the roadway. There was the dignity of the sea and its boundless freedom in their beautiful curves, which the abutting houses could not destroy, and even something of the sea's loneliness in the far-spaced ports and cabin windows lit up by the lamps of the prosaic landsmen who plied their trades behind them. One of these ships, transformed into a hotel, retained its name, the Niantic, and part of its characteristic interior unchanged. I remember these ships' old tenants — the rats — who had increased and multiplied to such an extent that at night they fearlessly crossed the wayfarer's path at every turn, and even invaded the gilded saloons of Montgomery Street. In the Niantic their pit-a-pat was met on every staircase, and it was said that sometimes in an excess of sociability they accompanied the traveler to his room. In the early "cloth-and-papered" houses — so called because the ceilings were not plastered, but simply covered by stretched and whitewashed cloth — their scamperings were plainly indicated in zigzag movements of the sagging cloth, or they became actually visible by finally drop-

ping through the holes they had worn in it! I remember the house whose foundations were made of boxes of plug tobacco — part of a jettisoned cargo — used instead of more expensive lumber; and the adjacent warehouse where the trunks of the early and forgotten “forty-niners” were stored, and — never claimed by their dead or missing owners — were finally sold at auction. I remember the strong breath of the sea over all, and the constant onset of the trade winds which helped to disinfect the deposit of dirt and grime, decay and wreckage, which were stirred up in the later evolutions of the city.

Or I recall, with the same sense of youthful satisfaction and unabated wonder, my wanderings through the Spanish Quarter, where three centuries of quaint customs, speech, and dress were still preserved; where the proverbs of Sancho Panza were still spoken in the language of Cervantes, and the high-flown illusions of the La Manchian knight still a part of the Spanish Californian hidalgo’s dream. I recall the more modern “Greaser,” or Mexican — his index finger steeped in cigarette stains; his velvet jacket and his crimson sash; the

many-flounced skirt and lace manta of his women, and their caressing intonations — the one musical utterance of the whole hard-voiced city. I suppose I had a boy's digestion and bluntness of taste in those days, for the combined odor of tobacco, burned paper, and garlic, which marked that melodious breath, did not affect me.

Perhaps from my Puritan training I experienced a more fearful joy in the gambling saloons. They were the largest and most comfortable, even as they were the most expensively decorated rooms in San Francisco. Here again the gravity and decorum which I have already alluded to were present at that earlier period — though perhaps from concentration of another kind. People staked and lost their last dollar with a calm solemnity and a resignation that was almost Christian. The oaths, exclamations, and feverish interruptions which often characterized more dignified assemblies were absent here. There was no room for the lesser vices; there was little or no drunkenness; the gaudily dressed and painted women who presided over the wheels of fortune or performed on the harp and piano attracted no attention from those ascetic

players. The man who had won ten thousand dollars and the man who had lost everything rose from the table with equal silence and imperturbability. *I* never witnessed any tragic sequel to those losses; *I* never heard of any suicide on account of them. Neither can *I* recall any quarrel or murder directly attributable to this kind of gambling. It must be remembered that these public games were chiefly rouge et noir, monté, faro, or roulette, in which the antagonist was Fate, Chance, Method, or the impersonal "bank," which was supposed to represent them all; there was no individual opposition or rivalry; nobody challenged the decision of the "croupier," or dealer.

I remember a conversation at the door of one saloon which was as characteristic for its brevity as it was a type of the prevailing stoicism. "Hello!" said a departing miner, as he recognized a brother miner coming in, "when did you come down?" "This morning," was the reply. "Made a strike on the bar?" suggested the first speaker. "You bet!" said the other, and passed in. *I* chanced an hour later to be at the same place as they met again — their

relative positions changed. "Hello! Whar now?" said the incomer. "Back to the bar." "Cleaned out?" "You bet!" Not a word more explained a common situation.

My first youthful experience at those tables was an accidental one. I was watching roulette one evening, intensely absorbed in the mere movement of the players. Either they were so preoccupied with the game, or I was really older looking than my actual years, but a bystander laid his hand familiarly on my shoulder, and said, as to an ordinary *habitué*, "Ef you 're not chippin' in yourself, pardner, s'pose you give *me* a show." Now I honestly believe that up to that moment I had no intention, nor even a desire, to try my own fortune. But in the embarrassment of the sudden address I put my hand in my pocket, drew out a coin, and laid it, with an attempt at carelessness, but a vivid consciousness that I was blushing, upon a vacant number. To my horror I saw that I had put down a large coin — the bulk of my possessions! I did not flinch, however; I think any boy who reads this will understand my feeling; it was not only my coin but my manhood at stake. I gazed with a miserable show

of indifference at the players, at the chandelier — anywhere but at the dreadful ball spinning round the wheel. There was a pause; the game was declared, the rake rattled up and down, but still I did not look at the table. Indeed, in my inexperience of the game and my embarrassment, I doubt if I should have known if I had won or not. I had made up my mind that I should lose, but I must do so like a man, and, above all, without giving the least suspicion that I was a greenhorn. I even affected to be listening to the music. The wheel spun again; the game was declared, the rake was busy, but I did not move. At last the man I had displaced touched me on the arm and whispered, "Better make a straddle and divide your stake this time." I did not understand him, but as I saw he was looking at the board, I was obliged to look, too. I drew back dazed and bewildered! Where my coin had lain a moment before was a glittering heap of gold.

My stake had doubled, quadrupled, and doubled again. I did not know how much then — I do not know now — it may have been not more than three or four hundred dollars — but it dazzled and frightened me.

"Make your game, gentlemen," said the croupier monotonously. I thought he looked at me — indeed, everybody seemed to be looking at me — and my companion repeated his warning. But here I must again appeal to the boyish reader in defense of my idiotic obstinacy. To have taken advice would have shown my youth. I shook my head — I could not trust my voice. I smiled, but with a sinking heart, and let my stake remain. The ball again sped round the wheel, and stopped. There was a pause. The croupier indolently advanced his rake and swept my whole pile with others into the bank! I had lost it all. Perhaps it may be difficult for me to explain why I actually felt relieved, and even to some extent triumphant, but I seemed to have asserted my grown-up independence — possibly at the cost of reducing the number of my meals for days; but what of that! I was a man! I wish I could say that it was a lesson to me. I am afraid it was not. It was true that I did not gamble again, but then I had no especial desire to — and there was no temptation. I am afraid it was an incident without a moral. Yet it had one touch characteristic of the period

which I like to remember. The man who had spoken to me, I think, suddenly realized, at the moment of my disastrous *coup*, the fact of my extreme youth. He moved toward the banker, and leaning over him whispered a few words. The banker looked up, half impatiently, half kindly — his hand straying tentatively toward the pile of coin. I instinctively knew what he meant, and, summoning my determination, met his eyes with all the indifference I could assume, and walked away.

I had at that period a small room at the top of a house owned by a distant relation — a second or third cousin, I think. He was a man of independent and original character, had a Ulyssean experience of men and cities, and an old English name of which he was proud. While in London he had procured from the Heralds' College his family arms, whose crest was stamped upon a quantity of plate he had brought with him to California. The plate, together with an exceptionally good cook, which he had also brought, and his own epicurean tastes, he utilized in the usual practical Californian fashion by starting a rather expensive half-club, half-restaurant

in the lower part of the building — which he ruled somewhat autocratically, as became his crest. The restaurant was too expensive for me to patronize, but I saw many of its frequenters as well as those who had rooms at the club. They were men of very distinct personality; a few celebrated, and nearly all notorious. They represented a Bohemianism — if such it could be called — less innocent than my later experiences. I remember, however, one handsome young fellow whom I used to meet occasionally on the staircase, who captured my youthful fancy. I met him only at midday, as he did not rise till late, and this fact, with a certain scrupulous elegance and neatness in his dress, ought to have made me suspect that he was a gambler. In my inexperience it only invested him with a certain romantic mystery.

One morning as I was going out to my very early breakfast at a cheap Italian café on Long Wharf, I was surprised to find him also descending the staircase. He was scrupulously dressed even at that early hour, but I was struck by the fact that he was all in black, and his slight figure, buttoned to the throat in a tightly fitting frock

coat, gave, I fancied, a singular melancholy to his pale Southern face. Nevertheless, he greeted me with more than his usual serene cordiality, and I remembered that he looked up with a half-puzzled, half-amused expression at the rosy morning sky as he walked a few steps with me down the deserted street. I could not help saying that I was astonished to see him up so early, and he admitted that it was a break in his usual habits, but added with a smiling significance I afterwards remembered that it was "an even chance if he did it again." As we neared the street corner a man in a buggy drove up impatiently. In spite of the driver's evident haste, my handsome acquaintance got in leisurely, and, lifting his glossy hat to me with a pleasant smile, was driven away. I have a very lasting recollection of his face and figure as the buggy disappeared down the empty street. I never saw him again. It was not until a week later that I knew that an hour after he left me that morning he was lying dead in a little hollow behind the Mission Dolores — shot through the heart in a duel for which he had risen so early.

I recall another incident of that period,

equally characteristic, but happily less tragic in sequel. I was in the restaurant one morning talking to my cousin when a man entered hastily and said something to him in a hurried whisper. My cousin contracted his eyebrows and uttered a suppressed oath. Then with a gesture of warning to the man he crossed the room quietly to a table where a regular *habitué* of the restaurant was lazily finishing his breakfast. A large silver coffee-pot with a stiff wooden handle stood on the table before him. My cousin leaned over the guest familiarly and apparently made some hospitable inquiry as to his wants, with his hand resting lightly on the coffee-pot handle. Then — possibly because, my curiosity having been excited, I was watching him more intently than the others — *I* saw what probably no one else saw — that he deliberately upset the coffee-pot and its contents over the guest's shirt and waistcoat. As the victim sprang up with an exclamation, my cousin overwhelmed him with apologies for his carelessness, and, with protestations of sorrow for the accident, actually insisted upon dragging the man upstairs into his own private room, where he furnished him

with a shirt and waistcoat of his own. The side door had scarcely closed upon them, and I was still lost in wonder at what I had seen, when a man entered from the street. He was one of the desperate set I have already spoken of, and thoroughly well known to those present. He cast a glance around the room, nodded to one or two of the guests, and then walked to a side table and took up a newspaper. I was conscious at once that a singular constraint had come over the other guests — a nervous awkwardness that at last seemed to make itself known to the man himself, who, after an affected yawn or two, laid down the paper and walked out.

“That was a mighty close call,” said one of the guests with a sigh of relief.

“You bet! And that coffee-pot spill was the luckiest kind of accident for Peters,” returned another.

“For both,” added the first speaker, “for Peters was armed too, and would have seen him come in!”

A word or two explained all. Peters and the last comer had quarreled a day or two before, and had separated with the intention to “shoot on sight,” that is, wher-

ever they met, — a form of duel common to those days. The accidental meeting in the restaurant would have been the occasion, with the usual sanguinary consequence, but for the word of warning given to my cousin by a passer-by who knew that Peters' antagonist was coming to the restaurant to look at the papers. Had my cousin repeated the warning to Peters himself he would only have prepared him for the conflict — which he would not have shirked — and so precipitated the affray.

The ruse of upsetting the coffee-pot, which everybody but myself thought an accident, was to get him out of the room before the other entered. I was too young then to venture to intrude upon my cousin's secrets, but two or three years afterwards I taxed him with the trick and he admitted it regretfully. I believe that a strict interpretation of the "code" would have condemned his act as unsportsmanlike, if not *unfair!*

I recall another incident connected with the building equally characteristic of the period. The United States Branch Mint stood very near it, and its tall, factory-like chimneys overshadowed my cousin's roof.

Some scandal had arisen from an alleged leakage of gold in the manipulation of that metal during the various processes of smelting and refining. One of the excuses offered was the volatilization of the precious metal and its escape through the draft of the tall chimneys. All San Francisco laughed at this explanation until it learned that a corroboration of the theory had been established by an assay of the dust and grime of the roofs in the vicinity of the Mint. These had yielded distinct traces of gold. San Francisco stopped laughing, and that portion of it which had roofs in the neighborhood at once began prospecting. Claims were staked out on these airy placers, and my cousin's roof, being the very next one to the chimney, and presumably "in the lead," was disposed of to a speculative company for a considerable sum. I remember my cousin telling me the story — for the occurrence was quite recent — and taking me with him to the roof to explain it, but I am afraid I was more attracted by the mystery of the closely guarded building, and the strangely tinted smoke which arose from this temple where money was actually being "made," than by anything else. Nor did

I dream as I stood there — a very lanky, open-mouthed youth — that only three or four years later I should be the secretary of its superintendent. In my more adventurous ambition I am afraid I would have accepted the suggestion half-heartedly. Merely to have helped to stamp the gold which other people had adventurously found was by no means a part of my youthful dreams.

At the time of these earlier impressions the Chinese had not yet become the recognized factors in the domestic and business economy of the city which they had come to be when I returned from the mines three years later. Yet they were even then a more remarkable and picturesque contrast to the bustling, breathless, and brand-new life of San Francisco than the Spaniard. The latter seldom flaunted his faded dignity in the principal thoroughfares. "John" was to be met everywhere. It was a common thing to see a long file of sampan coolies carrying their baskets slung between them, on poles, jostling a modern, well-dressed crowd in Montgomery Street, or to get a whiff of their burned punk in the side streets; while the road leading to their

temporary burial-ground at Lone Mountain was littered with slips of colored paper scattered from their funerals. They brought an atmosphere of the Arabian Nights into the hard, modern civilization; their shops — not always confined at that time to a Chinese quarter — were replicas of the bazaars of Canton and Peking, with their quaint display of little dishes on which tidbits of food delicacies were exposed for sale, all of the dimensions and unreality of a doll's kitchen or a child's housekeeping.

They were a revelation to the Eastern immigrant, whose preconceived ideas of them were borrowed from the ballet or pantomime; they did not wear scalloped drawers and hats with jingling bells on their points, nor did I ever see them dance with their forefingers vertically extended. They were always neatly dressed, even the commonest of coolies, and their festive dresses were marvels. As traders they were grave and patient; as servants they were sad and civil, and all were singularly infantine in their natural simplicity. The living representatives of the oldest civilization in the world, they seemed like children. Yet they kept their beliefs and sympathies to them-

selves, never fraternizing with the *fanqui*, or foreign devil, or losing their singular racial qualities. They indulged in their own peculiar habits; of their social and inner life, San Francisco knew but little and cared less. Even at this early period, and before I came to know them more intimately, I remember an incident of their daring fidelity to their own customs that was accidentally revealed to me. I had become acquainted with a Chinese youth of about my own age, as I imagined, — although from mere outward appearance it was generally impossible to judge of a Chinaman's age between the limits of seventeen and forty years, — and he had, in a burst of confidence, taken me to see some characteristic sights in a Chinese warehouse within a stone's throw of the Plaza. I was struck by the singular circumstance that while the warehouse was an erection of wood in the ordinary hasty Californian style, there were certain brick and stone divisions in its interior, like small rooms or closets, evidently added by the Chinamen tenants. My companion stopped before a long, very narrow entrance, a mere longitudinal slit in the brick wall, and with

a wink of infantine deviltry motioned me to look inside. I did so, and saw a room, really a cell, of fair height but scarcely six feet square, and barely able to contain a rude, slanting couch of stone covered with matting, on which lay, at a painful angle, a richly dressed Chinaman. A single glance at his dull, staring, abstracted eyes and half-opened mouth showed me he was in an opium trance. This was not in itself a novel sight, and I was moving away when I was suddenly startled by the appearance of his hands, which were stretched helplessly before him on his body, and at first sight seemed to be in a kind of wicker cage.

I then saw that his finger-nails were seven or eight inches long, and were supported by bamboo splints. Indeed, they were no longer human nails, but twisted and distorted quills, giving him the appearance of having gigantic claws. "Velly big Chinaman," whispered my cheerful friend; "first-chop man — high classee — no can washee — no can eat — no dlinke, no catchee him own glub allee same nothee man — China boy must catchee glub for him, allee time! Oh, him first-chop man — you bet-tee!"

I had heard of this singular custom of indicating caste before, and was amazed and disgusted, but I was not prepared for what followed. My companion, evidently thinking he had impressed me, grew more reckless as showman, and saying to me, "Now me showee you one funny thing — heap makee you laugh," led me hurriedly across a little courtyard swarming with chickens and rabbits, when he stopped before another inclosure. Suddenly brushing past an astonished Chinaman who seemed to be standing guard, he thrust me into the inclosure in front of a most extraordinary object. It was a Chinaman, wearing a huge, square, wooden frame fastened around his neck like a collar, and fitting so tightly and rigidly that the flesh rose in puffy weals around his cheeks. He was chained to a post, although it was as impossible for him to have escaped with his wooden cage through the narrow doorway as it was for him to lie down and rest in it. Yet I am bound to say that his eyes and face expressed nothing but apathy, and there was no appeal to the sympathy of the stranger. My companion said hurriedly, —

"Velly bad man; stealee heap from

Chinamen," and then, apparently alarmed at his own indiscreet intrusion, hustled me away as quickly as possible amid a shrill cackling of protestation from a few of his own countrymen who had joined the one who was keeping guard. In another moment we were in the street again — scarce a step from the Plaza, in the full light of Western civilization — not a stone's throw from the courts of justice.

My companion took to his heels and left me standing there bewildered and indignant. I could not rest until I had told my story, but without betraying my companion, to an elder acquaintance, who laid the facts before the police authorities. I had expected to be closely cross-examined — to be doubted — to be disbelieved. To my surprise, I was told that the police had already cognizance of similar cases of illegal and barbarous punishments, but that the victims themselves refused to testify against their countrymen — and it was impossible to convict or even to identify them. "A white man can't tell one Chinese from another, and there are always a dozen of 'em ready to swear that the man you 've got is n't the one." I was startled to reflect that I, too,

could not have conscientiously sworn to either jailor or the tortured prisoner — or perhaps even to my cheerful companion. The police, on some pretext, made a raid upon the premises a day or two afterwards, but without result. I wondered if they had caught sight of the high-class, first-chop individual, with the helplessly outstretched fingers, as that story I had kept to myself.

But these barbaric vestiges in John Chinaman's habits did not affect his relations with the San Franciscans. He was singularly peaceful, docile, and harmless as a servant, and, with rare exceptions, honest and temperate. If he sometimes matched cunning with cunning, it was the flattery of imitation. He did most of the menial work of San Francisco, and did it cleanly. Except that he exhaled a peculiar druglike odor, he was not personally offensive in domestic contact, and by virtue of being the recognized laundryman of the whole community his own blouses were always freshly washed and ironed. His conversational reserve arose, not from his having to deal with an unfamiliar language, — for he had picked up a picturesque and varied vocabulary with ease, — but from his natural

temperament. He was devoid of curiosity, and utterly unimpressed by anything but the purely business concerns of those he served. Domestic secrets were safe with him; his indifference to your thoughts, actions, and feelings had all the contempt which his three thousand years of history and his innate belief in your inferiority seemed to justify. He was blind and deaf in your household because you did n't interest him in the least. It was said that a gentleman, who wished to test his impassiveness, arranged with his wife to come home one day and, in the hearing of his Chinese waiter — who was more than usually intelligent — to disclose with well-simulated emotion the details of a murder he had just committed. He did so. The Chinaman heard it without a sign of horror or attention even to the lifting of an eyelid, but continued his duties unconcerned. Unfortunately, the gentleman, in order to increase the horror of the situation, added that now there was nothing left for him but to cut his throat. At this John quietly left the room. The gentleman was delighted at the success of his ruse until the door reopened and John reappeared with his master's

razor, which he quietly slipped — as if it had been a forgotten fork — beside his master's plate, and calmly resumed his serving. I have always considered this story to be quite as improbable as it was inartistic, from its tacit admission of a certain interest on the part of the Chinaman. *I* never knew one who would have been sufficiently concerned to go for the razor.

His taciturnity and reticence may have been confounded with rudeness of address, although he was always civil enough. "I see you have listened to me and done exactly what I told you," said a lady, commending some performance of her servant after a previous lengthy lecture; "that's very nice." "Ycs," said John calmly, "you talkee allee time; talkee allee too much." "I always find Ling very polite," said another lady, speaking of her cook, "but I wish he did not always say to me, 'Good-night, John,' in a high falsetto voice." She had not recognized the fact that he was simply repeating her own salutation with his marvelous instinct of relentless imitation, even as to voice. I hesitate to record the endless stories of his misapplication of that faculty which were then current, from

the one of the laundryman who removed the buttons from the shirts that were sent to him to wash that they might agree with the condition of the one offered him as a pattern for "doing up," to that of the unfortunate employer who, while showing John how to handle valuable china carefully, had the misfortune to drop a plate himself—an accident which was followed by the prompt breaking of another by the neophyte, with the addition of "Oh, hel-lee!" in humble imitation of his master.

I have spoken of his general cleanliness; I am reminded of one or two exceptions, which I think, however, were errors of zeal. His manner of sprinkling clothes in preparing them for ironing was peculiar. He would fill his mouth with perfectly pure water from a glass beside him, and then, by one dexterous movement of his lips in a prolonged expiration, squirt the water in an almost invisible misty shower on the article before him. Shocking as this was at first to the sensibilities of many American employers, it was finally accepted, and even commended. It was some time after this that the mistress of a household, admiring the deft way in which her cook had

spread a white sauce on certain dishes, was cheerfully informed that the method was "allege same."

His recreations at that time were chiefly gambling, for the Chinese theatre wherein the latter produced his plays (which lasted for several months and comprised the events of a whole dynasty) was not yet built. But he had one or two companies of jugglers who occasionally performed also at American theatres. I remember a singular incident which attended the début of a newly arrived company. It seemed that the company had been taken on their Chinese reputation solely, and there had been no previous rehearsal before the American stage manager. The theatre was filled with an audience of decorous and respectable San Franciscans of both sexes. It was suddenly emptied in the middle of the performance; the curtain came down with an alarmed and blushing manager apologizing to deserted benches, and the show abruptly terminated. Exactly *what* had happened never appeared in the public papers, nor in the published apology of the manager. It afforded a few days' mirth for wicked San Francisco, and it was epigrammatically

summed up in the remark that "no woman could be found in San Francisco who was at that performance, and no man who was not." Yet it was alleged even by John's worst detractors that he was innocent of any intended offense. Equally innocent, but perhaps more morally instructive, was an incident that brought his career as a singularly successful physician to a disastrous close. An ordinary native Chinese doctor, practicing entirely among his own countrymen, was reputed to have made extraordinary cures with two or three American patients. With no other advertising than this, and apparently no other inducement offered to the public than what their curiosity suggested, he was presently besieged by hopeful and eager sufferers. Hundreds of patients were turned away from his crowded doors. Two interpreters sat, day and night, translating the ills of ailing San Francisco to this medical oracle, and dispensing his prescriptions—usually small powders—in exchange for current coin. In vain the regular practitioners pointed out that the Chinese possessed no superior medical knowledge, and that their religion, which proscribed dissection and

autopsies, naturally limited their understanding of the body into which they put their drugs. Finally they prevailed upon an eminent Chinese authority to give them a list of the remedies generally used in the Chinese pharmacopœia, and this was privately circulated. For obvious reasons I may not repeat it here. But it was summed up — again after the usual Californian epigrammatic style — by the remark that “whatever were the comparative merits of Chinese and American practice, a simple perusal of the list would prove that the Chinese were capable of producing the most powerful emetic known.” The craze subsided in a single day; the interpreters and their oracle vanished; the Chinese doctors’ signs, which had multiplied, disappeared, and San Francisco awoke cured of its madness, at the cost of some thousand dollars.

My Bohemian wanderings were confined to the limits of the city, for the very good reason that there was little elsewhere to go. San Francisco was then bounded on one side by the monotonously restless waters of the bay, and on the other by a stretch of equally restless and monotonously shifting sand dunes as far as the Pacific shore.

Two roads penetrated this waste: one to Lone Mountain — the cemetery; the other to the Cliff House — happily described as “an eight-mile drive with a cocktail at the end of it.” Nor was the humor entirely confined to this felicitous description. The Cliff House itself, half restaurant, half drinking saloon, fronting the ocean and the Seal Rock, where disporting seals were the chief object of interest, had its own peculiar symbol. The decanters, wine-glasses, and tumblers at the bar were all engraved in old English script with the legal initials “L. S.” (*Locus Sigilli*), — “the place of the seal.”

On the other hand, Lone Mountain, a dreary promontory giving upon the Golden Gate and its striking sunsets, had little to soften its weird suggestiveness. As the common goal of the successful and unsuccessful, the carved and lettered shaft of the man who had made a name, and the staring blank headboard of the man who had none, climbed the sandy slopes together. I have seen the funerals of the respectable citizen who had died peacefully in his bed, and the notorious desperado who had died “with his boots on,” followed by an equally im-

pressive cortége of sorrowing friends, and often the self-same priest. But more awful than its barren loneliness was the utter absence of peacefulness and rest in this dismal promontory. By some wicked irony of its situation and climate it was the personification of unrest and change. The incessant trade winds carried its loose sands hither and thither, uncovering the decaying coffins of early pioneers, to bury the wreaths and flowers, laid on a grave of to-day, under their obliterating waves. No tree to shade them from the glaring sky above could live in those winds, no turf would lie there to resist the encroaching sand below. The dead were harried and hustled even in their graves by the persistent sun, the unremitting wind, and the unceasing sea. The departing mourner saw the contour of the very mountain itself change with the shifting dunes as he passed, and his last look beyond rested on the hurrying, eager waves forever hastening to the Golden Gate.

If I were asked to say what one thing impressed me as the dominant and characteristic note of San Francisco, I should say it was this untiring presence of sun and wind and sea. They typified, even if they

were not, as I sometimes fancied, the actual incentive to the fierce, restless life of the city. I could not think of San Francisco without the trade winds; I could not imagine its strange, incongruous, multigenerous procession marching to any other music. They were always there in my youthful recollections; they were there in my more youthful dreams of the past as the mysterious *vientes generales* that blew the Philippine galleons home.

For six months they blew from the northwest, for six months from the southwest, with unvarying persistency. They were there every morning, glittering in the equally persistent sunlight, to chase the San Franciscan from his slumber; they were there at midday, to stir his pulses with their beat; they were there again at night, to hurry him through the bleak and flaring gas-lit streets to bed. They left their mark on every windward street or fence or gable, on the outlying sand dunes; they lashed the slow coasters home, and hurried them to sea again; they whipped the bay into turbulence on their way to Contra Costa, whose level shoreland oaks they had trimmed to windward as cleanly and sharply as with

a pruning-shears. Untiring themselves, they allowed no laggards; they drove the San Franciscan from the wall against which he would have leaned, from the scant shade in which at noontide he might have rested. They turned his smallest fires into conflagrations, and kept him ever alert, watchful, and eager. In return, they scavenged his city and held it clean and wholesome; in summer they brought him the soft sea-fog for a few hours to soothe his abraded surfaces; in winter they brought the rains and dashed the whole coast-line with flowers, and the staring sky above it with soft, unwonted clouds. They were always there — strong, vigilant, relentless, material, unyielding, triumphant.

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